THE METAPHYSICAL POETS

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Grace Bagnall Branham

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Introduction

Everyone dealing with the English poetry of the 17th century is aware of a difficulty. It is a difficulty that has been variously explained, smoothed over, or avoided, but every fresh critic or historian makes a new attempt at a solution ventures anew, seeming not to take much satisfaction in what has been done already. The difficulty is due, at least in part, to the invention of a name; though, if the name had not been invented for us, we might have to invent it for ourselves, for it evidently signifies something. The trouble lies in the application. As applied originally it is plainly not satisfactory. It was not originally even defined satisfactorily, yet it is felt to be much too good a name to lose. But in what relation does the term stand to the 'precious' or ingenious style of writing? We have Dr. Johnson's definition of wit or the witty style and our task is to reapply it to the thing defined, to fix the limits of its adequacy, to rectify or replace it. If Dr. Johnson had not written his Essay on Cowley and started the epithet "Metaphysical", if critics had not thankfully accepted it and made its use regular, if the definition were not at once so good and so unsatisfactory, we should not be in our present confusion; investigators might have set out afresh, as they have done in Italy, to sift and distinguish, and might have arrived at results with more agreement in them. As it is, new criticism or offers of fresh sources

is only likely to add to the tangle already woven about the epithet. It was thrown off, by a stroke of insight, before scholarship was in a state to receive it, and has been in the way ever since. If it had been withheld until it had been made out that conceits were not the independent invention of a few poets but a craze prevalent all over west Europe; that in England ~~it~~ the craze took a variety of turns, some of them so marked as to acquire a name of their own like Euphuism or Arcadianism, just as in other countries it was called according to its various aspects Gongorism, Marinism or Préciosité; that the form it took depended on the material with which it combined and other ideals of style, - if it had been withheld unto now - though even yet a good deal of vagueness and inaccuracy clings to the whole subject - we would have known better what to do with it. As it is the investigator has to deal with a situation already created.

For us then the problem is something like this: In England poetical style very perceptibly changes at the end (roughly) of the Elizabethan period. The older style was not, of course, entirely abandoned, but even those who continued it introduced modifications; and the strength of poetical talent was with the new or classicist manner. ~~Classicist verse drops~~ Poetry more such tends to that fresh air of loose-gist spontaneity characteristic of Elizabethan singers, and conforms on the one hand to a more refined art, and on the other breaks out into an extravagance of ingeniousness, of verbal play and hyperbolic expression that confounds even the licensed verbalism of the witty Elizabethans. ~~The first part of the change~~ Its growth can fairly be attributed to classical ideas we account for by the ascendency

1. It is ~~both~~ this 2d aspect of 17th century poetry that the term the is ~~applied~~ to is usually related.

2. It is not to be should expect of a movement forming part of the renaissance, which shifted its appearance according to the face of the country it lighted up, this movement, which always signifies, is identical in no two literatures, English poetry is by no means an exception. Very likely, ~~in~~ ~~[illegible]~~ in that of borrowing took place, as in other phases of the renaissance.

of classical influences which had been making their way from the first glimmer of the renaissance, and the dying out under classical pressure of medievalism. Beyond this account one may search for reasons, as many do, in the fields of politics and religion,- Catholicism broken, the arising up a secular and individual state arising, etc.; but these remoter causes even were they certainly known would shed so little direct light that they may safely be left alone. Of the second part of the change, not only are the causes disputed but also the elements which compose it. We are uncertain what it is, where it comes from, what are its aims and uses. Looking about, we find ~~it~~ the same ~~rebat~~ ingenuity in all European literatures, occurring not quite at the same moment of time but at the same point of relation to their renaissance as the English to theirs. ~~It~~ follows in the wake of the full renaissance and is, in very instance, in essence, not an English or an Italian but a renaissance phenomenon; and its general causes and nature are to be sought in ~~the changing aspects of that movement.~~ whatever it was that brought the renaissance to its close.

And we find also that though ingenuity is everywhere present at this period, it is not identical in every literature. This is what we should expect of a movement which forms part of the renaissance. It is made a problem whether we borrowed from Italy, as Dr. Johnson supposed, (the English fashion deriving from that arch-vendor of conceits, Marino. as the French is known to have done[1] or Italy from Spain or Spain from Italy and

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1. Chasles, V. E. P., Rev. Deux de Mondes, 1840, 4 s. v. 23, p. 581.

so on. But at no period did the renaissance act in that exclusive fashion. The renaissance was a spirit which woke up a country and set its national forces to expand themselves. At the same time it would follow that one nation drew freely on another, usually on that nation where the renaissance was most flourishing and picturesque; England had learned the habit of looking to Italy. But unless a country had felt impulses of its own, it would not have reached out to borrow. So it may be supposed that the same thing holds for ingenuity as for the other details of the renaissance, - each nation borrowed freely abroad because it felt a like need at home. England, arriving at the period of conceits, made no more than a certain use of what had been done with them in Italy and Spain. France.

If this account of the matter be the true one, and it seems plausible, the investigator of the Metaphysical school need not be held back until such questions as to the effect of Marino on the English, their debt to Gongora and Queveda, etc., shall be determined. These are really problems prior to his. It would be of more use for him to determine what exactly is the difference between Gongorism and the Marinistic style, and how far these fashions were combined with that peculiar exaggeration of Pléiade introductions and liberties introduced by the popular Du Bartas, which makes up the manner of some of the English poets, and it would be a useful branch of inquiry to try and discover to which of these manners various English poets leaned. But these are refinements; all the evidence really necessary may be discovered with little investigation; it has to

do with the way English conditions on the whole modified the action of the dolce stil nuovo. Croce (2) shows that in Italy it fastened on to the general literary decadence and issued in a sickly sensuousness and barren ingenuity. There it is marked, curiously from the English point of view, by a conventional diction. In France it is association with vers de société (one would say its right place), and in Spain with pulpit eloquence. The style is commonly assumed to be a sign of decadence- Professor Courthope's word is the "efflorescence of decay". But though that may be true of other countries, it is hardly true of England, for there, whatever hard things may be said of the style and whatever harm it worked, the poets most fond of it were by no means empty of genius or barren of feeling: Donne, Marvell, Drummond, Herrick,- the list is long - are not decadent writers.

We leave problems behind us, but this a sufficient account of the state of affairs as it stands between English poetry generally and the ingenious style which, not for accuracy but convenience, is called "conceited." Every country in Europe where there was a literature, caught the new manner and responded each in its own way; England in hers.

But here we are brought to what especially concerns us. It is usually conceded that there is in English literature, in the poetry of this period, a style called Metaphysical. It is

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2. Saggi sulla Letteratura Italiana del Seicento, Barri, Laterza, 1911.

spoken of as a style, a vein, a manner, or a school. The name, as I said, comes from Dr. Johnson who applied it as a term of abuse to the work of Cowley and Donne in particular but included others. Critics keep the term, applying it, sometimes as abuse, sometimes not, to Cowley and Donne and other 17th century poets, though the rest of the list does not coincide with Dr. Johnson's and has never been fixed with much agreement. The list does not agree with Dr. Johnson's because our feeling about the word (it has never been satisfactorily redefined) does not agree with his definition, and until the definition is fixed we cannot settle with certainty upon the thing defined. It is not agreed in what relation the Metaphysical style stands to the style of conceits; of what, besides conceits, it consists; whether or not it has any good in it; whether it is Donne's creation imparted by him to others, or whether he simply shares it with others; whether, indeed, it exists at all. Professor Dowden, for his part, denies it altogether, saying flatly that he does "not believe in the existence of the so-called Metaphysical school."[3]

It is the kind of problem to invite investigation but there have been but few square attacks made upon it. I know of only two:- Dr. Johnson's, made before it was a problem, and, lately, Professor Courthope's. In addition to these there are, scattered about in essays and chapters that required some discus-

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3. Essay on Donne.

sion of the subject, remarks, suggestions and opinions, sometimes made with insight and acuteness, but seldom at sufficient length to take into consideration the difficulties. Dr. Johnson's results I will give somewhat fully, because the idea belongs to him, and because much of what he says is excellent and still remains unchallenged.

"The Metaphysical poets were men of learning, and to show their learning was their whole endeavour, but, unluckily, resolving to show it in rime, instead of writing poetry they only wrote verses, and very often such verses as stand the trial of the finger better than of the ear... They neither copied nature nor life; neither painted the forms of matter nor represented the motions of the intellect. Those, however, who deny them to be poets allow them to be wits... (But)if wit be well described by Pope, they certainly never attained or even sought it... for they endeavoured to be singular and were careless of their diction.... Their thoughts are often new but seldom natural; they are not obvious but neither are they just, and the reader, far from wondering that he missed them, wonders by what perverseness of industry they were ever found.

"But wit may be more rigorously...considered as a kind of discordia concors, or combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in thing apparently unlike. Of wit thus defined they have more than enough. The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons and allusions; their learning instructs and their subtlety surprises; but the reader

commonly thinks the improvement dearly bought and though he sometimes admires he is seldom pleased.

"They were not successful in representing or moving the affections... but wrote rather as beholders than as partakers of human nature.. Their courtship was devoid of fondness and their lamentation of sorrow..

"Nor was the sublime more within their reach then the pathetick.. Their attempts were always analytical.. What they wanted of sublime they endeavoured to supply by hyperbole (and) .. produced combinations of confused magnificence that not only could not be credited but could not even be imagined...

"(Yet), no man could be born a Metaphysical poet.. (Or write in this style)by descriptions borrowed from descriptions, by imitations borrowed from imitation,by tradiational imagry and hereditary similes, by readiness of rime and volubility of syllables." He believes that the school derived this way of writing from its Italian contempory Marino and was founded in England by Donne and Ben Jonson. Of these "the immediate successors of whom any trace can be said to remain" are "Suckling, Waller, Denham, Cowley, Cleveland and Milton."

Since, if not the least limited, Dr. Johnson is one of the soundest-minded of English critics, his very prejudices carrying him sone distance toward the truth; where he takes an objection it, it better for our credit in examining it to remember our limitations as well as his. We may, however, simply discount his version of the origin and foundation of the manner, which never pretended to much erudition. Marino's probable relation

to the school I have already indicated. Ben Jonson is not open to any of Dr. Johnson's strictures and could hardly be the founder of a manner he seldom, if ever, makes use of. And, Cowley excepted, almost any poet of the period writes as "Metaphysically" as the poets named; not a few more so; while the three chief offenders after Donne and Cowley he simply omits, though I suppose some remembrance lasted over into Dr. Johnson's time of Herbert, Vaughan, and Crashaw. But for the body of the definition: If English poetry is to be judged by Pope's standards, this free censure is just; and, indeed, by any standard, it is not entirely underserved. The endeavour of the poets Dr. Johnson describes was not "to copy nature or life"; they were singular (though not careless, such studious search after unconventional words may not be called carelessness) in their diction; their thoughts are "often new and seldom natural" and do show a certain "perverseness of industry". As he says, "the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together", and readers may very well resent having their surprise and admiration snatched from them by these unusual methods, as Dr. Johnson's were snatched from him in the very midst of inveighing against Donne. Judged by Pope's standard these poets are irreclaimably bad, as bad as Dr. Johnson says and worse, because they detested above everything Pope's crowning beauty - rehabilitating "what oft was thought." But Pope's standards would make short work of many an admired bard among those who have succeeded him as well as of these predecessors of his.

But the great fault in Dr. Johnson's criticism is that it defines the school in terms of its defects. The only merit

it allows to Donne, the great Donne, Cowley, and the rest is the merit, grudgingly granted, of originality. (Learning, in ~~poetry is, of course, nong.~~ merit.) It may be said that he was aiming at a bad principle in style and so only censure was in order; but, as a matter of fact, he hardly attempts to treat ingenuity as a principle, distinguishable from the poetry as a whole of the men he is criticizing, but levels his abuse at both in lump. Yet even if he had, his perspicacity would not be entirely saved, for no one can deny that closely associated with this same principle (bad or not), if not by its means, there was produced, at least in England, passages and even whole poems of undeniable charm and power. It is something however to be thankful for that he laid his finger so certainly upon a defect.

If we are trying to discover what it is that constitutes the school and what its relation to the conceited style, the light thrown by the Essay on Cowley is very indirect. By deriving the school from Marino, and classing as Metaphysical such writers as Suckling and Waller, Dr. Johnson implies that he is aiming at conceits of whatever kind; by naming Ben Jonson he shows that in his mind the school has a connexion, and a close connexion, with the classicists. On the other hand, the conceits he picks out for censure are a special variety of conceit, marked chiefly by subtlety and hyperbole, and of a strange foreign-to- this-earth cast which drew from him the epithet, anathema in his mouth, of Metaphysical. I should say, then, that Dr. Johnson means to describe the whole phenomenon of conceits, but that what he actually does describe is the particular turn which Donne and Cowley gave it. Whether there are others

who gave it a similar turn, whether the turn rests on any deeper principle or attitude of mind, are, of course, questions he neither answers nor raises.

On the whole then, I think it fair to assume that Dr. Johnson carries us on to the view that there is in 17th century English poetry a special development of the conceited style; that this development is closely associated with Donne and Cowley; and that 'metaphysical' in its philosophic sense,[4] is the name by which it is best characterized. Metaphysical would never be the word called forth by the ordinary use of conceits; these may be and often are steeped in sense.

Next to Dr. Johnson, Professor Courthope is our fullest critic on this subject, so let us try to make out where his views take us. Mr. Courthope is more learned than Dr. Johnson and more inclined to theory, but, he lacks Dr. Johnson's gift of immediate perception. His very learning and the necessity he feels to account for phenomena get in his way and impede his judgments. Considerably over half of one of the large volumes of his History of English Poetry he devotes to the poetry of conceits, and one chapter exclusively to the discussion of the "Nature and Origin of Poetical Wit". The book is so accessible that I need not recount his conclusions in great detail; suffice it to say that Mr. Courthope accepts Dr. Johnson's definition of wit - discordia concors- as a definition that covers the whole conceited style. He calls it poetical wit and includes

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4. At least in Dr. Johnson's conception of its philosophic sense. Metaphysical philosophy aroused in Dr. Johnson, the same impatience which he feels for this poetry. One remembers his behaviour when an account was given him of Berkeley's theories.

under it almost all the Stuart poets except Milton[5]. His plan is to distribute them according to the character of their wit, a great innovation on the usual method, which is to follow down earlier divisions of Spenserians, Arcadians, Didactics, etc. His division indicates how great an importance he attached to the style, which is thus allowed to override what, at first sight at least, seem to be more vital and valuable distinctions. But though, Dr. Johnson's definition of Metaphysical wit he treats as covering the whole field he himself proceeds to analyze the conceited style ("wit") into various developments. Thus he has chapters on: (1) Theological Wit; (2) Court Wit; (3) Metaphysical Wit (this he defines for himself); (4) Cavalier and Roundhead Wit; (5) Last Days of Wit. On the surface this division seems to have more reference to other matters than to wit, itself, and, if we look twice at it, we shall convince ourselves that such a distribution of the style is unreal and for convenience only. Take the division he calls theological wit. The poets who fall under it are: (Chapter VII, under Elizabeth and James I) Southwell, the Fletchers, Sir John Davies of Hereford, (Chapter X, under Charles I) Quarles, Herbert, Crashaw, Vaughan. Only an artificial caption could bring such a list under one head. What Mr. Courthope must mean is, not that the wit is theological but that these writers incline to theological themes - a very

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5. And Milton he excludes not because his style is freer of conceits than that of all others but because, on account of his greatness, he deserves separate treatment.

different matter. Theological distinguishes a science, not a school of poetry. Poets of all schools write about religion, as Mr. Courthope illustrates when he brings together as theological poets Quarles, the Fletchers, and Herbert. This is to introduce scientific where only poetical distinctions are in place. And, as if to make the unreality of the method still more explicit, Mr. Courthope goes on to introduce first a political division (Cavalier and Roundhead) and then a chronological. Wit for Mr. Courthope remains essentially one; coupling it with epithets revelant to other matters does not divide it.

There is, however, one chapter where the adjective would seem to be meant for the wit itself, not the writer. By Metaphysical wit his single example shows that he has not in mind a metaphysician who embellished his style with conceits, which he should have meant had he been meticulous about parallel arrangement, and included in this chapter the Cambridge Plantonists. As treated by him the Metaphysical school has only one member, Donne. Donne is not in the philosophic sense a metaphysician, but his style, as Mr. Courthope describes it, has a strong affinity with philosophical metaphysics. "Beyond the sphere of theological allegory.. lay the region of pure thought; and here the contradiction between medieval and modern ideas furnished ample materials for the exercise of "wit"... In the sphere of reason a new kind of Pyrrhonism sprung up.. Many poets[6] seized upon

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6. Mr. Courthope says here that there are others, and in other chapters continues to use the term, metaphysical; but he nowhere assigns more members to the school by name. (p.200) he remarks "there is also a tendency to fuse the schools of Metaphysical and theological wit."

the rich materials of the old and ruined philosophy to decorate the structures which they built out of their lawless fancy. On such foundations rose the school of Metaphysical wit."[7]

Earlier (p.105) Mr. Courthope had found the general causes of poetical wit, i.e., the whole field, in "the decay of scholastic philosophy and of the feudal system..and in the revival of the civic standards of antiquity. Such a collision of forces is plainly sufficient to account for that discordia concors." So, though he does not say so expressly, he would seem to indicate vice to that his idea of it, Metaphysical is distinguished from poetical wit as being more directly concerned with philosophic speculation.

I need not stop over the rest of his explanation. It falls in with his hypothesis of political causes; and though these great changes doubtless do lie behind changes in letters, they are remoter than purely literary causes (and, since remoter, more disputable) and only come into consideration after those. Besides political changes Mr. Courthope indicates a literary source for conceits in the Provencal poetry of the 14th century, and concludes that their "predominance in the later age signifies the efflorescence of decay." (p. 106) This last explanation conflicts perhaps with the conflict theory; but at any rate it is useful for us to remember that conceits, in some form, are no new thing in literature; they go back even beyond the 14th

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7. History of English Poetry, v.III, pp. 417-8.

century.[8]

In spite of its breadth of learning the helps we get from his discussion of Professor Courthope are only side helps; on the side of pure theory we are not carried very much beyond the place where Dr. Johnson left us. We are reinforced, though again not very specifically, in the ~~belief~~ opinion that the Metaphysical style in something other than the style of conceits. But the definitions and distinctions are, from our point of view, anything but precise. Nothing really adequate is substituted for Dr. Johnson's description of the Metaphysical style, and we are left in almost the same state of uncertainty as to which are the Metaphysical poets.

A little light is shed on this last question by the remark I quoted earlier in a note, i.e., that there is a tendency to fuse the Metaphysical school with the theological. If Mr. Courthope is referring to his own division and means there is a tendency to class Francis Quarles, Sir John Davies, Giles and Phineas Fletcher as poets of the same school with Donne, it can only be on the ground of theological subject matter, for there is no other possible bond among them. But he does not mean that. His remark is made in connexion with the newer men, especially Herbert, whose style he defines as "an extension of the scholastic subtlety of Donne" (p. 200).

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8. "Courthope seems to me to have been victimized by the associations of the term 'metaphysical' in a very native way. A 'Metaphysical' poet, in Johnson's sense, need not be a philosophical poet, nor even one who used the materials of the old philosophy to decorate his verse." Mr. Lovejoy's note.

There is in fact such a tendency to class with Donne poets who in their mode of thinking as well as in their style resemble Donne. Professor Grierson[9] says the Donne's closest followers are to be found among the devout Anglican poets (that would be Herbert and Vaughan). Mr. Sidney Lee[10] who is prepared to derive the whole Metaphysical vein "which is usually said to have been inaugurated in English poetry by Donne" from Du Bartas, sees also in Du Bartas the founder of English religious poetry. I do not know how far the word itself, Metaphysical, may be influencing this tendency to draw in religious poetry; very likely it has its share of influence, but certainly, the names which modern criticism is apt to associate with Donne's (Donne always remaining the chief examplar of the school) are those which represent speculation of a philosophic and intellectual cast set forth in a fantastic and wayward manner.

But in what relation do these poets stand to Donne? One may be associated with Donne without being exactly a follower of his,- epigone, I believe is Mr. Saintsbury's word. It is one thing to constitute a school with a man, however great and cen-

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9. The First Half of the 17th Century, p. 164.

10. The French Renaissance in England, p. 354. "Donne's concordia discors, his combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike, is anticipated by Du Bartas", etc. Mr. Lee implies that there is a Metaphysical school and that Dr. Johnson defines it, and his analysis of the kind of conceits Du Bartas used shows that he conceives of theirs and his as belonging to a special order.

tral he be, and quite another to be his imitators. If no more is meant than that Herbert, Cowley and the rest copied Donne's mannerisms, looked to him for inspiration, - if the Metaphysical quality in them is only a working-over of his Metaphysical quality, and their style is altogether owing to him, it is fruitless to study them independently; Donne is the man to be studied. So far, especially since Donne's great vogue, the trend has been rather in this direction; it is the fashion to attribute to him not only the inauguration of the style but also its complete fulfilment, as though Donne's genius covered the whole manifestation and Donne and Metaphysical were synonomous terms. To be Metaphysical is to be like Donne.

This may seem a not unfair solution. Donne is easily the greatest poet in the vein; the style suited itself perfectly to his genius, and genius and style so conspicuously concurring, it is natural enough to indentify them.

At this point the question resolves itself into this: Is Donne the chief exponent of a more general movement, or does he sum up in himself a peculiar manner, both begin it and give it complete expression? If the latter, then Vaughan, Herbert, Cowley are not Metaphysicals in their own right but only because among a host of imitators they also imitated. In that case what would be their relation to Donne's other imitators? It is plain that there is a great difference between them and the line of poets who walked in Donne's footsteps,- as many almost as those who walked in Ben Jonson's. These last would hardly be called Metaphysical. The best that can be said for the theory

of imitation is that while the "devout Angelicans" imitated the Metaphysical vein, the rest imitated something else,- his cynicism, arrogance, intellectual brutality or the like. That would be to say that the Metaphysical vein may be separated from other qualities in Donne which belong to him exclusively; that his style is composed of the combination of his own individual qualities with the Metaphysical manner. In other words they are not to be regarded as identical. And we may conclude that however apt was Donne's genius to the Metaphysical vein- whatever that is- and however high he excelled others in giving it expression, Donne is in reality only giving out his version (so to speak) of an influence which was there to be assimilated by whoever had a turn that way.

It would be possible to imitate Donne's Metaphysical side without oneself having ~~the~~ a turn for it, and that is what, now and again, Carew and others do. But the difference between this formal kind of imitation and the resemblance to Donne in poets able ~~to themselves~~ to assimilate, and out of their own natures to give expression to the Metaphysical influence, is as obvious as possible. Carew, for example, cannot be brought into the same class with Herbert, and the reason why he cannot is that Herbert writes upon a ground of philosophic and serious thought.

Donne's imitators, then, fall into two classes: (1) Those who either copy the part of his genius not specifically Metaphysical, or the Metaphysical part merely formally and (2) imitators or not in the formal sense, who have a natural and

real affinity to the Metaphysical strain in him.

Since this second class are related not only to Donne but also to each other, we are led to this more definite position: Donne, ~~for all he is~~ that the most brilliant and influential Metaphysical, is not the only one, There are other poets with a right to the title - a title distinct from "the School of Donne" - on the ground that they are fellow recipients with him of an influence or principle or attitude (or all three) that moves outside of as well as within his work. How far Donne is the originator of this influence; how far in debt for it to others (to Du Bartas, as Mr. Lee suggests, to the Italians - certainly not Marino but earlier - to English drama, etc.) is as yet very vaguely known. Still enough may be inferred from what can be seen without special examination, and from the general law which prevents any poet, even as original a poet as Donne, from very great independence, - to convince us that, though he was the first to formulate, Donne neither originated entirely nor exhausted the movement.

Summary: We may take it to be the sense of English criticism,- though owing to the scarcity of discussion its sense mainly by implication,- that the Metaphysical vein is a special and separate English development of the style of conceits, a style that runs parallel in all west European literatures; that it is more than a stylistic development, extending to spirit as well as to form; that it is a movement and not merely a peculiarity of Donne's genius; that its examplars are, beside Donne, Cowley, Herbert, Vaughan and perhaps Crashaw and others.

To seek to analyse the character of the Metaphysical genius, which is the object of this essay, I have to assume all that procedes; I have to assume that my reading of criticism is, if not proved, at least sufficiently likely to serve as an hypothesis. The only method by which one may come to conclusions about this character is, as far as I can see, to examine the work of those poets who, on a loose, general impression, are supposed to be Metaphysical,- the poets I have named with the view of determining in what respects they are different from their contemporaries next in order; what elements both of style and spirit they have in common; and whether they are governed by common principles, or principles nearly enough related to constitute a real and important connexion.

CHAPTER I

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Conceits

Since for so long the Metaphysical style has been confounded with the style of conceits, its first great critic having defined this identity as the right judgment to be passed upon it, the succeeding painful critic is more or less obliged to take up the matter from that point of view, and to begin by resolving what part in the Metaphysical manner conceits do occupy. Admirers of the school may object that this is not quite fair; that it is as if one should take up the Romantic School, say, from the point of view of its sentimentality, and that to begin at its weakest point is hardly the best way to arrive at a fair estimate of the whole. They might be right if the field were a fresh field; but as things stand, with this growth of old prejudice upon them, and prejudice which in the eyes of many critics seems justly founded, my plain business is to try to understand and to explain it.

Besides, there is an actual advantage in beginning with conceits. In the Metaphysical style, they play, there is no denying it, a rôle out of all proportion to any other single feature; and they are so opposite to all regular notions of good poetic style that they are bound to distract the reader, and to force him to attend to them first. Dr. Johnson's was the most natural reaction in the world; for us not to follow him would be only short of affectation. And another reason, though we may not like them we have no right to take it for granted that

that they constitute a weakness, like the sentimentality of the Romantic School, a weakness that their authors would have wanted to avoid. It is plain from the way these authors expended themselves upon conceits that they counted them a very great attraction; from the way they bring the full strength of their high powers to their elaboration, that they considered them much more than a concession to mere fashionable taste. They are grave poets, for the most part writing in altogether another tone from the frivolous Italians; and their intense use of this manner, if anything increasing as their tone grows more impassioned, leaves us in no doubt that while not, as Dr. Johnson supposed, forming the substance, their genius gladly expressed itself by, and felt an evident affinity with, the style of conceits. This raises the figure to the dignity of a poetic principle.

However, not much is gained toward understanding the nature of their genius by the mere fact that it had an affinity with conceits. In themselves conceits are an almost colourless element of style; not until the character of the conceit and the principle upon which it is used are brought out will they help us to distinguish one style from another. If Dr. Johnson took them to be the sole distinguishing trait of the school, he made the mistake of defining the part in terms of the whole. Everyone knows now that the kind of mental and verbal ingenuity we call conceits, of one kind and another, is to be found in

European poetry from the 12th century on; the Provencal poets used them, Petrarch took them over and passed them on; Dante used them, so did the Spaniards, the Italian Arcadians, the English Euphuists; Christian poetry generally, (led on most probably by the paradoxes and ingenious symbolism of the Fathers) seems to have turned them to account. Even in classic poetry there are examples; Horace's startling phrase, splendide mendax, is either a conceit or not far from it; and Homer, leaving the thick of battle and a wounded hero, in order to draw out a comparison between the purple painted work on the ivory nose-pieces of horses and the blood pouring down the white thigh of Menalaus, shows a detachment that is one main source for this kind of ingenuity. So it follows that if traces of them are found in the most perfect classics, plainer prints almost everywhere in Christian poetry, and an out-and-out use of them in much Renaissance poetry, simply their presence, even in abundance, is not enough to distinguish a genre. If we are to found conclusions upon conceits, we shall have to consider, beside their frequency, their nature and the service to which they are put; not until these things are settled have we the right to see in conceits a ground of difference between one school and another.

On account of the utter difference in their general styles, between the Metaphysical writers and the elder school of conceits there is very little danger of confusion; an examination of differences in the particular of conceits would be

tedious and throw no light that we would not get from a comparison with their contemporaries. It is true that Sir Philip Sidney's sonnets deserve most of the adjectives Dr. Johnson bestows on Metaphysical verse;they contain comparisons which are strange, far-fetched, elaborate, unnatural. The Arcadia and Euphues deserve them still more. These two works, as Mr. Child makes out for us,[2] are each written on its own distinct principle of preciosity. But we need not be so discriminating; from our point of view they fall together with the sonnets, as illustrating, the elaborate verbalism that marks the Elizabethan conceit. It does not hold absolutely in either instance but the stress in the earlier manner is upon ingenuity in language, as in the succeeding style it is upon mental ingeniousness. Spenser, who at all times leans a little heavily on mere words, is pleased with conceits that would set classicist teeth on edge. Dearly as most classicists loved a conceit, they would have viewed such lines as Spenser's

> "His dearest love him dolefully did beare,
> The dolefullest beare that ever men did see"
>
> Astrophel, 1148-50

with utter disdain. The Metaphysicals agreed with all their non-

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2. C. G. Child: John Lyly and Euphuism, Münchener Beiträge.. VII, 1894.

Spenserian contemporaries in rejecting any conceit that involved the lush wordiness of this kind of writing. Nobody is likely to mix up the Metaphysical conceit with the Spenserian, not though the usual adjectives are as applicable to one as to the other. As Mr. Grierson says - "Fantastic is not a very distinctive title to apply to the poetry of Donne and his followers;... if conceit and far-fetched similitude are a sign of decadence the Elizabethan poetry was born decadent."[3] Though fantasy and ingenuity and, let me add, uncertain taste were as rife in one period as in the other, the style in which the conceits were set is sufficient to keep the two apart. Nobody calls Constable's sonnets Metaphysical though they are heavy-laden with conceits; nor a conceit like this of Sir Walter Raleigh's -

> "For there Christ is the King's attorney,
> Where there are angels but no fees"
>
> (Raleigh & Wotten, p. 28)

though Donne might have used the same fancy. There is one "wittie" Elizabethan, however, who - (though his versification has the slow movement of his period, and his wit is a little old-fashioned and deliberate, yet on account of his method and intention, which is to exhibit, in a spirit of sincere reverence, the most solemn subjects in a dress of verbal affectation) more nearly resembles the Metaphysicals than they their theological contem-

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3. Essays in literature in Seventeenth Century, p. 139.

poraries. Southwell is more like them because he makes the conceit itself an instrument of thought and emotion, - but more of him when we come to them.

Any real danger of confusion there may be lies between the Metaphysicals and their contemporaries who employed either a similar style to theirs or a similar background of thought. There the general style of one group of writers, and, of another group, the strain of thought so nearly resembles Metaphysical style and thought, that it is by no means easy to give the group a clear outline and say definitely such and such a conceit is Metaphysical, or such a passage or even such a poet. Moreover, in many important respects these poets I am treating as Metaphysical do not hold together as a group against their contemporaries, but fade off into them; they have, each separate one of them, relations and influences outside the group, so that if I were considering any one of them alone I should have to discriminate points of contact for him that would concern none of the others. For example, I am convinced that Donne found sustenance for his genius in quarters to which the rest were all blind; it is plain that Crashaw was the only one to study Marino to effect; Vaughan was particularly steeped in astrology and so on. For these reasons and because in any case lines between groups are largely a matter of the literary imagination, it would be deceiving ourselves to insist on clear and sharp differences throughout; the best we can hope for, especially in this matter of conceits, is

to establish certain broad distinctions, not grieving too much if we find that in point of detail the most thoroughbred Metaphysical may coincide with a poet who has no real claim to the title.

Still certain broad and important distinctions may be established. But before launching upon that I must ask the reader to think back a little into the poetic conditions of the early 17th century. For us it has the aspect of a division into several camps of which the most distinguishable are the Spenserians, who cling with deepest affection to the slow cadences and wordy discursiveness of the older verse, and the metrical reformers associated with Ben Jonson. The Spenserians are really only one variety of the belated Elizabethans, Arcadians and lyrists, who ~~but they~~ manage to keep their skirts clearer of the new manner than do most; the other late Elizabethans are more inclined to compound. The theologizing Spenserians touch the Metaphysicals on the side of subject matter, though in style and general attitude ~~these~~ the Metaphysicals are much nearer to the tribe of Ben, especially to men like Marvell. Both schools make free with conceits, following, though not too strictly, each its own governing principles. The Spenserians, continuing to worship beauty, at the expense of what seemed to Jonson better things; to practise a fluid and unhasting manner, to Platonize in Spenser's vein, and turning away, even further than Spenser had turned, from active life, took conceits rather by their sensuous side, as a new addition to the beauties of style, and hung them up among their other decora-

Differences between the and other poets in their use of concrete.

[illegible]

tions. On the other hand it was toward active and actual life that Jonson turned, away from beauty. Or if not exactly away, yet to a conception of beauty more like the plastic ideal of the ancients, to which a vigorous energy of expression was a necessity to give it clarity of outline. A conceit - as a piece of mental ingenuity - was serviceable to this ideal because it pointed and sharpened the thought; on the whole, where the Spenserians put conceits to ornamental uses, the tribe of Ben put them to energetic. But only on the whole, purposes crossed to the loss of consistency; as energetic they were used to quicken beauty; as ornamental to lend delicacy to energy. Yet there is a base of consistency in this general drift which to know will help us to find our way among the conceits of poets who, while scorning any beauty that interfered with energy, worshipping energy, are no less fond of the paradoxes of theology.

1. Upon the first point of difference we may disregard the distinctions of Spenserian and classicist; the Metaphysicals surpassed all their contemporaries in the prodigal, the spendthrift freedom with which they scatter conceits through their poetry. This is not a question of actual counting, it is a question of the way, in Metaphysical poets, the conceits rise up and strike you in the face. At a time when they were an admired fashion, when there was scarcely a poet whose delight was not, as Professor Dowden puts it, "in subtleties of thought, in over-ingenious fantasies, in far-fetched imagry, in curiosity, and not always felicitous curiosity, of expression,"[4] these Metaphysic-

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4. Essay on Donne, in New Studies in Literature, p. 92.

als so expended themselves in this direction as to leave even their generation behind them. Conceits are set closer together in their pages than in the pages of even so "conceited" a writer, as Cleveland; instead of being found in occasional passages or bringing up the end of stanzas and sonnets, they crowd upon one another's heels so that it is unusual to find a whole poem, or even a whole stanza, which is completely free of them. It would be an endless task to illustrate this by quotation, but let the reader take up a volume of Marvell, or Cleveland, or Lord Falkland and read parallel with these any one of the Metaphysicals, and though upon other points he may be puzzled to explain the difference, and though he will find many too many conceits for his taste in both sets, he will be left in no doubt as to which runs the fashion further into the ground. Metaphysical poetry, most of it looks at first sight to be a very tissue of conceits. It is not quite so extravagantly conceited in point of the actual number of conceits as at first it has the look of being; the extravagance of the figures themselves counts for much of our impression, and, as I shall try to make out later, the texture of the style, even when not formally conceited, is in large part made up of the elements of conceits; yet all allowance being made, the Metaphysicals, for lavishness, bear the bell.

2. But, Besides exceeding others in the number of their conceits, they exceed them as well in the extravagance of the conceit itself. It is the nature of a conceit to be extravagant, subtle, difficult, strange; their excess is not in kind but in

degree; they go further. Their hyperboles are vaster, their puns more improbable and more striking, their paradoxes clash harder, their comparisons are farther-fetched or piled up higher, their antitheses sharper, their surprises more surprising, their subtleties more involved. If curiosity, ingenuity, fantasy were common novelties they made them uncommon by the pitch to which they carried them. It is hardly in human power to be more curious, more ingenious, more fantastic than the Metaphysicals. It will be taken for granted that I do not mean that in every instance a Metaphysical conceit towers above a non-Metaphysical, or that all their conceits are immoderate. Seizing as they do upon even the least opportunity for a display of wit, they have sometimes to put up with a small display; they cannot always be extraordinary in their inventions, and non-Metaphysical poets may often be extraordinary in theirs. Therefore not much may be judged from an isolated conceit. Herbert or Vaughan or Crashaw or Cowley (not Donne) might just as well have written,—

> "And him to prey as he to pray began,
> The citizens of the wild forest ran",

as Giles Fletcher, who is really responsible;[5] and though Drummond wrote, Herbert might have signed,—

> "Thy nails my pen shall be, thy blood mine ink,
> Thy winding sheet my paper, study grave."
> (II, p. 7)

These are in the commoner vein. But Donne himself might have been proud to father Marvell's

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5. Christ's Victory and Triumph, Canto I, St. I.

"Nature, that hateth emptiness,
Allows of penetration less;
And, therefore, must make room
When greater spirits come", -
(Poems, p. 135)

a conceit in the true Metaphysical spirit.

But though in some instances, they may be ~~they~~ are not likely to be on a level with their contemporaries. They may pun as feebly as Giles Fletcher, they may say, -

"Unmindful of himself, to mind his Lord,
The lamb stood gazing at the tiger's side";
(C's V. & T. I, 5)

but they are much more likely to drive their puns harder, to say -

"As to a stomach starved whose insides meet,
Meat comes "
(D. II, p. 2)

and the same with the other forms of conceit. Where Fletcher is content with a simple antithesis, -

"He was best clothed when naked was his side",
(C's V. & T. I, 12)

Crashaw proceeds to illustrate it, -

"Thee with thyself they have too richly clad,
Opening the purple wardrobe of thy side."
(p. 109)

So does he carry on (what is really the same fancy) with, -

"Leaving her only so much breath
As serves to keep alive her death"
(p. 103)

beyond Fletcher's

"He never lives that thus is never slain"
(C's V.& T. I, 9)

So Vaughan with his -

"And from the murdering world's false love
Thy death shall keep my soul alive" -
(I, p.)

improves upon Phineas Fletcher's -

"A life that ever dies and death that lives";
(Apol. I, 36)

which, in reality, ~~shows no~~ is scarcely an advance over Spenser himself. Fletcher writes, -

"So rise we by our fall" (Apol. II, 17)

but Herbert,

"So may the fall further the flight in me",
(p. 43)

and Cowley, giving the fancy another turn, -

"Reason, which, God be praised! still walks for all
Her old original fall."
(p. 47)

~~I give~~ These examples from the Metaphysicals not so much on account of extravagance, but, as illustrating that vigorous impulse to pass beyond the ordinary, that inability to rest content with the easy and obvious - conceits may be both ~~- ordinary and simple,~~ - which leads to extravagance. The Fletchers would quickly be vanquished in a contest of extravagance pure and simple; they were Spenserians and so held back from excess by a necessity for gentleness laid on them by their rhythm. For ruder and bolder examples we had better turn to someone like Donne's admirer, Carew, who is not likely to be accused of restraint. Certainly he is putting none on himself when he writes, -

"Nor can your snow, though you should take
Alps into your bosom, slake
The heat of my enamoured heart"
(p. 46)

reaching what for a non-Metaphysical is a high level of hyperbole. But even in point of pure size his ambitious "Alps" shrinks be-

fore the monstrous conceptions of Donne; to overmatch it Cowley, and that not at his most hyperbolic, is quite sufficient:-

> "See where she sits, and in what comely wise
> Drops tears more fair than others' eyes! ...
> Pray heaven, her forehead, that fair hill of snow,
> ..Melt not to feed the beauteous stream below!
> .....She weeps tears so wondrous cold...
> So cold, that I admire they fall not hail".
> (pp. 136-7)

Or, contesting it as a stretch of - fancy, I suppose is the word, there should be a harsher one - Crashaw comes off an easy victor with his unlucky -

> "Two walking baths, two weeping motions,
> Portable and compendious oceans."
> (p. 126)

And Carew's figure is dwarfish beside (what for Donne is no great stretch) -

> ".....She whose rich eyes and breast
> Gilt the West Indies and perfumed the East";
> (II, p. 112)

as that itself is beside another comparison which (in the Anniversary) follows it, a comparison that for height, extravagance, strangeness, is beyond competition. Simply no more could be said of any woman:-

> "She to whom this world must itself refer
> As suburbs or the microcosm of her." (II, p. 112)

I need not go on quoting specimens of non-Metaphysical conceits; such as I have given will serve for illustration and for a standard whereby to measure Metaphysical excess. For height of extravagance no poet, in his group or out of it, and it seems safe to say, English or foreign, approaches Donne, and Donne surpasses himself in his Anniversaries. Even the examples Dr. Johnson

[illegible] indirectly by an [illegible] person.

quotes against him in the Essay, as outraging all moderation and proportion, are of a shorter flight than these. Cowley's Pindariques are pitched almost as high, though in a different key. Cowley seems rather to incline to astonish with his cleverness than to confound with his scope, though both at once pleases him best, as when (he brings them both together) to describe Elijah ~~as~~ (alluding to his translation) as

> "The second man who leapt the ditch where all
> The rest of mankind fall,
> And went not downward to the sky."
> (p. 205)

One more instance, taken this time from Crashaw, will suffice to illustrate this form of extravagance. It shows, since by nature Crashaw had little of the Gascon in him, how uncumbant upon him a Metaphysical felt it to write in this tall fashion; and it also shows how it was possible for Milton to learn from their hyperbole the trick of his sublimity:-

> "And pouring on Heaven's face the sea's huge flood"
> Quench his curled fires".
> (P. 18)

6/ Of the other forms of their excess, so many instances will be coming up in the remainder of this essay that I need not here give more than a few. Herbert has the most "curious". By "curiosity I mean what I think is meant generally, a strained fancifulness that excites in the reader not pleasure but a kind of languid surprise. Herbert is curious when to eulogise the Sabbath he addresses it thus:-

> "The other days and thou
> Make up one day whose face thou art";
> (p. 86)

and later in the same poem he is still more curious -

> "The Sundays of man's life,
> Threaded together on time's string,
> Make bracelets to adorn the wife
> Of the eternal, glorious King."
> (pp. 87-88)

~~To see~~ how deeply a conceit may be involved and worked out at great length, read Cowley's Tree of Knowledge. In it he contrives to make the apologue from Genesis fit point by point into an argument for Pyrrhonism; its "apples are demonstrative", its leaves probabilities, rhetoric and fallacies which, with "useless pride" Adam strives to cover his nakedness, that is, our ignorance, etc. Herbert goes almost the same lengths of ingenuity in The Odour, (p. 220). c) For subtlety take Donne:-

> "She, in whom virtue was so much refined
> That, for alloy unto so pure a mind,
> She took the weaker sex ",
> (II, p. 110)

though it would be hard here to say whether he is more subtle or more extravagant.

d) For close and difficult thought take this from Vaughan:-

> "The flowers to air draw near, and subtilty
> And seeds a kindred fire have with the sky"
> (I, p. 140)

or this from Crashaw:-

> "And wrongs repent to diadems. (p. 134)

3. A third dissimilarity already begins to emerge in the examples quoted, poor and unattractive as many of these are. Indeed, in point of intrinsic charm a Metaphysical conceit makes few claims; and, it is upon this inferiority of theirs that I wish to enlarge. It is so in regard to both the Spenserian and to

the Jonsonian variety, or to exchange that terminology for what seems to me a better, to the renaissance - romantic, or, more ~~simply~~ briefly, romantic, and to the classicists variety of conceit. On principle, the classicist conceit looks to increase mental energy; but mental energy is kept in hand, and not encouraged at the expense of general attractiveness; so subordinated, a conceit often becomes a light and pleasing element of wit. Often, it is more ornamental even than it is in the hands of those poets who make the mistake of treating it as a principle of ornamentation. But since I am accenting principles I must begin by comparing the Metaphysical conceit with the romantic. Preoccupied as was that school with beauty, they would naturally have welcomed conceits as a delightful element of style; the more naturally as their idea of beauty, like Spenser's before them, depended at least as much on contrast as upon congruity. They are ready to offend congruity and to risk the dignity of their subject for the sake of heightening the beauty of their style, just as the Metaphysicals are ready to offend congruity and risk dignity for the sake of its energy; the difference lies less in the result than in the intention. The renaissance-romantic poet adds his conceit to his thought as a bit of decoration; he uses it like a jewel or a coloured riband,- an ornamental superfluity. Taste is no test of this distinction, because taste is a matter of congruousness; and seriousness of subject matter is not a test either; a poet may be both tasteless and serious and yet not be a Metaphysical if he intends his conceit to decorate his style instead

[illegible] beauty [illegible],

[illegible] thought [illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible], to increase the [illegible]

[illegible], as well as a bishop, [illegible]

[illegible]

To leave out the [illegible] distinct [illegible]

[illegible] than [illegible]

[illegible] but [illegible] a poet [illegible]

[illegible] in this fashion that [illegible] first

[illegible] he [illegible] with [illegible]

[illegible] came [illegible] to [illegible] the

[illegible]

[illegible])

[illegible] not [illegible]; [illegible] t. The last

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible] that [illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

of increasing the vigour of his expression. Vigour of expression is the third point of dissimilarity. The effect of the conceits I have quoted from the Fletchers is one of languor; but we will leave the Fletchers, and make use for our comparison of a poet who, while he retained the same ground of dissimilarity, has more similarity of genius to the Metaphysical. I have already referred to him, the Jesuit martyr Southwell. The Spenserians are too apt to break the seriousness of their tone by the introduction of a conceit, but Southwell knows the Metaphysical secret of winning a kind of pathos from the conjunction of conceits and seriousness. Like theirs his conceits may be made the instrument of thought and add,- touchingly, at times - to that gentle ardour which makes the atmosphere of his pages. He writes wholly upon religious themes, believing them, in all sweetness and seriousness, to be best conveyed in the garb of verbal ingenuity fashionable in Elizabeth's days as in James'. There are lines and whole stanzas in Southwell that might almost have been - not quite - written by various members of the Metaphysical group, they have so much in common that one is tempted to make of him,- what he comes nearer than anyone else to being, - a literary predecessor.

He is nearer to the others than to Donne, but still even to him shows a legible resemblance; place this beside Donne:-

> "Alas! if God so sink under sin,
> What will become of man that dies therein?"
> (p. 105)

or this,-

> "If pictures move, more should the pattern please."

Perhaps it is due to their both being Catholics that Southwell

reminds one so strongly of Crashaw:-

> "His naked breast stands for a shield,
> His battering shot are babyish cries"
> (p. 111)

is very like, and compare with Crashaw's "young eternity" this line:-

> "The old of years an hour hath not outrun";
> (p. 137)

with his general manner, these:-

> "Not where I breathe but where I love, I live";
> (p. 84)

> "Almighty Babe, whose tender arms
> Can force all foes to fly ";
> (p. 71)

(in this last the oxymoron, paradox, and alliteration are all exactly in Crashaw's vein) and also:-

> "Alas! our day is forced to flee by night";
> (p. 134)

> "O <u>prostrate</u> Christ, <u>erect</u> my crooked mind!"
> (p. 106)

With Vaughan he has less direct connexion, but this couplet, while not a conceit, nor even particularly Metaphysical, is too like Vaughan to pass over,-

> "There is a time e'en for the worm to creep,
> And suck the dew while all her foes do sleep."
> (p. 69)

But Most of all he resembles Herbert. His homeliness, his reverence, his familiar tenderness, his didacticism, his puns and pilings-up of epithet phrases, are all so like Herbert that is hard not to believe that it was from him that Herbert learned them. The resemblance is not always upon the Metaphysical side, is even contrary to it, as in the turn they both evince for allegory (cf. Southwell's <u>Vale of Tears</u>, p. 158) but I cannot refrain

from quoting:- for familiarity, -

"When thou dost talk with God by prayer I mean";
(p. 185)

"Come Raphael, this babe must eat,
Provide our little Tobie meat."
(p. 111)

for unblushing puns,-

"As hay the brutest sinner to refresh";
(p. 137)

"A lock it proves that first was but a look";
(p. 91)

for sententiousness,-

"Here beauty is a bait that swallowed chokes";
(p. 85)

"Self-pleasing souls that play with beauty's bait";
(p. 91)

for piling up of phrases,-

"Moth of the mind, eclipse of reason's light,
The grave of grace, the mole of nature's rust", etc.
(p. 91)

Now, with all these resemblances why is it that no one would take Southwell, any more than the Fletcher, for a Metaphysical? To see why we have only to think of a characteristic Metaphysical conceit, of a verse like Donne's

"For that first marriage was our funeral,"
(II, p. 108)

or like Crashaw's

"Sure e'en from you (my flints!) some drops are due
(p. 102)

or like Cowley's

"Captived in every thing and only free
To fly from thine own liberty ", (p. 219)

in which the conceit, not used as an ornament but as an energetic

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

reinforcement of the thought, brings out the mental inactivity (compared with theirs) of the older poet.

4. But the true function of classicist conceit, though the conceit is often extremely charming in itself, is to enhance the air of active-mindedness with which the classicist, like the Metaphysical, aims to surround his work. One has only to think of the Cavalier poets; they are sprightliness itself. As a piece of witty acrobatics could anything outdo Waller's conceit upon a poet who had missed love to win fame, comparing his fate to Apollo's when he pursued Daphne:-

> "Like Phoebus thus acquiring unsought praise,
> He catched at love and filled his arms with bays"?

I suppose the meaning we now attach to the word "wit" is due to their performance. At any rate I need not resort to quotation to convince the reader that the most important use the classicists found for conceits was to render sparkling the outline of their thought, to inject mental life ~~into their work~~ in place of the older sensuousness. And as far as they went in this direction the Metaphysicals were with them; where, then, lies the difference? In this: The prevailing tone of the classicists is light and graceful and they use conceits to add to it lightness and an agile grace; in other words, the function of a classicist conceit is to banish seriousness, which in their eyes is confounded with heaviness - their abomination. Though it is not present in all classicists, the classicists' tendency is to avoid emotional seriousness; even when the subject itself is serious the effect of the conceit, or, the conceited style, is

[illegible]

to detach it - since emotion alone furnishes poetci conviction - from reality. Marvell understood this and turned it to extraordinary account; by means of it he reduces living persons and emotions to statues and aesthetic abstractions as though these had no reality but what was flected in the calm and observing mind of the beholder. His poem on the grievous death of a young Scotch hero who refused to leave his burning ship is perfect in this manner:-

> " Fond boy, why so untame
> That fly'st love's fires, reserved for other flame?"...
> "No other fear himself could comprehend,
> Than lest heaven fall ere hither he ascend...
> " His ahape exact which the bright flames enfold,
> Like the sun's statue stands of burnished gold", etc.
> (Poems, p. 127)

Less serious poets than Marvell put the conceit to still lighter uses. And when, as sometimes happens, they mingle a conceit with a grave theme, its effect is to impair its seriousness, even when its beauty is left intact. There is a charming conceit with which Drummond concludes a sonnet on the death of the beloved. Gathered about the bed the band of mourners watch death finally close in, and

> "Seeing so fair him come in lips, cheeks, eyes,
> Cried, "Ah! and can Death enter Paradise?"

The effect, artistically irreproachable, is to remove the scene from the sphere of human action altogether. Here, as in the case of the Spenserians, the artistic advantages are all on the non-Metaphysical side. They are concerned to have their conceits pretty as well as enlivening.

The Metaphysical feels no such concern; all he requires of a conceit is that its effect be quickening; his own thought

[illegible]) this explain[illegible], [illegible] it is that the poet [illegible] belong to [illegible] with the [illegible] style [illegible] [illegible] style [illegible] [illegible] it is the characteristic of [illegible] to convey his meaning through [illegible] that [illegible] to prefer [illegible].

Sometimes [illegible] or whatever [illegible] a little, then the poet is apt to miss, [illegible] not deliberately [illegible]. Complexity, is [illegible], [illegible] when he can [illegible] his Anglo-Saxon [illegible] [illegible] poems, [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible], [illegible] the contrast between [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] too [illegible] [illegible] of [illegible] will [illegible] the poet [illegible] [illegible] his [illegible] words [illegible]

being substantial, he thus makes it an instrument capable of conveying actual meaning and compels it to carry a actual burden. That it does so is the distinguishing mark of the Metaphysical conceit. It adds liveliness without taking away from seriousness. The secret of his method if not to separate the conceit, either to ornament or to point it, from the actual substance of thought; not to treat it as an addition to but as a vehicle of thought. He thinks in conceits, while it is the non-Metaphysical way to touch off thought by their means. This explains why the poetry of conceit is likely to be more graceful in non-Metaphysical hands, or in Metaphysical at their least characteristic. Cowley is nowhere so delightful as in his Anacreontiques and probably nowhere so un-Metaphysical. There almost entirely he follows the classicist method, yet, even so, he sometimes succeeds in making the conceit itself the actual instrument of the sentiment he has to convey. That it should be capable of conveying the thought is the real condition for its being serious, but, just now all I wish to bring out is its capacity for serving as a channel of ideas. The sentiment Cowley expresses in the Swallow is of the most ethereal kind, but to distinguish his method of conveying it, compare the Swallow with a poem of Marvell's written very much in the manner of the Anacreontiques. The tone of his verses Upon Appleton House is light, though the feeling is genuinely patriotic, while in Cowley's piece both are light. Marvell is comparing a flower-garden to an armed and vigilant camp, and then goes on to deploie that England, that island-garden, has become in reality a field of

arms, and concludes with a regret for her former state of peace and innocence, ~~which he concludes with this pretty conceit~~:-

> "When roses only arms did bear
> And men did rosy garlands wear".
> (Poems, p. 17)

By means of the conceit he gives an exquisite emphasis to the emotion, but the emotion is not in the conceit. Take it away and some charm will be lost but nothing essential to the sentiment. But take away the conceit from these lines of Cowley's and the whole sentiment, which rests on the delicately insinuated metaphor, evaporates:-

> "Cruel bird, thou'st ta'en away
> A dream out of my arms to-day...
> Thou this damage to repair
> Nothing half so good cast bring,
> Though men say thou bringst the spring".
> (p. 58)

I have chosen these examples on purpose to try to draw what is after all a rather fine distinction. They draw it, perhaps, almost too fine; however I do not insist upon the illustrations but only upon the principle, for which there are plenty of less dubitable examples, ~~When, for instance~~, Herbert writes, speaking of the temple of the Lord's body,-

> "In three days razed and raised as before",
> (p. 26)

he is not simply making a punning addition to his meaning, not like the Fletchers, half altering the sense to admit the pun; he is compelling the pun, however awkwardly, to carry the weight of what he has to say. Artistically it isn't very successful, but I am not speaking just now of success. He is no more poetical when he writes,-

Moor [illegible] in [illegible] in [illegible],
may strike the reader as [illegible] but [illegible] great [illegible] in
effect; but they [illegible] to exhibit a method. And it is a
method that permits them to be what he [illegible] in
the concrete. This [illegible] in other [illegible] [illegible]
both in thought [illegible] and [illegible] personal
conception. Parents, [illegible] [illegible]
make what it is that makes one important in the future,
and what kind of a method may be. Their thought is

"Ladies, look here! This is the thankful glass
That mends the lookers' eyes",
(p. 62)

but his meaning, that the Scriptures reveal to us at once our evil and the cure for it, is both accurately and succintly conveyed. As much may be said of this conceit of Vaughan's,-

"How art thou now, thy flock to keep,
Become both food and shepherd to thy sheep."
(I, p. 134)

To make myself clear I will choose for comparison a non-Metaphysical conceit of a similar turn to conceits of theirs; it turns upon one of the commonest subjects for plays of this kind, the miracle that restored his sight to the blind beggar; this is Giles Fletcher's version:-

"He that should them compare, at length would find
The blind man only saw, the seers were all blind."
(Christ's Triumph & Death, St.60)

Now, as such a transparent phrase as "at length would find" discovers, the sole origin and excuse for this is what Dr. Johnson calls the "desire to be witty." It is a play, a piece of wit, and no more; it is in addition to and outside of the body of his meaning. The following lines from Herbert, though more elaborate and still more incongruous, are not outside the body of his meaning, but, on the contrary, contain it. From the altar of the cross, Christ complains, as in the old miracle plays, to the passing crowd:-

"Behold they spit on me in scornful wise,
Who with my spittle gave the blind man eyes,
Leaving his blindness to my enemies."

4-b. ~~But to go back to the matter of seriousness.~~ The

Metaphysicals not only incorporate the conceit into their thought, so that it not merely does not break but actually advances it; they make it serve them as well as an instrument, a ready instrument, for their gravest utterance, and ~~it is in this respect, principally, that theirs differ from classicist usage.~~ So many more instances of their ability to force a strained and unnatural mode into yielding strong and moving notes will be coming up later that here I shall content myself with two or three. But first I ought to warn the reader again that I say nothing for their success. Their thought is not always prompted by emotion; they are not poets of that greatness to speak only from that depth where thought and emotion blend; they fail like other poets; on account of the peculiar difficulty of their style, they are ~~even~~ prone to sink; though when they do they have the merit to sink rather into emotionless sense than into senseless emotion. And when, as often, they seem devoid of poetry (in the sense of thought blended with and hightened by emotion) one need not be in too great haste to put the blame upon their "bad habit of conceits"; the defect may be deeper. I am not defending conceits; but trying to show that with the Metaphysicals they are only a sign, a sign of a vigorous and unruly thinking faculty. Sometimes their emotion is strong enough to get the upper hand of their turbulent brains, and when it does, their very ingenuity, which Croce says is a barren principle in art, - thus subdued, becomes a source of pathos and power. Where is the artificiality, where the frigidity, in this "conceit" of Donne's -

> "O more than moon,
> Draw not up seas to drown me in thy sphere!"
> (p. 40, I)

So deeply is ingenuity worked into the paste of their genius that it becomes one with it, and the conceits in these stanzas from Herbert and Crawshaw pass unnoticed even by those readers who most feel their power; yet they contribute not a little to that power:-

> "I got me flowers to straw thy way,
> I got me boughs off many a tree;
> But thou wast up by break of day,
> And brought'st thy sweets along with thee."
> (p. 42)

> "Thy restless feet now cannot go
> For us and our eternal good,
> As they were ever wont. What though?
> They swim, alas! in their own flood.
>
> "Thy hands to give thou can'st not lift;
> Yet will thy hand still giving be.
> It gives, bot O itself's the gift:
> It gives though bound; though bound 'tis free."
> (p. 107)

In contrast with these we have only to remember the poetry of the Cavaliers, in its vers de societe, or even better, in its attempts at seriousness,—such an attempt, for example as Carew's ludricous

> "Else, the soul grew so fast within
> It broke the outward shell of sin,
> And so was hatched a cherubin",
> (p. 79)

to understand the Metaphysical genius for combining with the fantasy of conceits a true and profound feeling.

5. A Metaphysical is distinguished, then, from a contempory conceit in these respects; it is more profuse, more extreme, more vigorous, and more capable of conveying thought and emotion. All these differences must point to something deeper, to something in the nature of their genius, and the last distinction I have to draw points the same way. It is the readiness and naturalness with which the Metaphysicals fall into this most un-

[illegible] Not [illegible] it

natural style. The conceited style is in its nature a tour de force, but the Metaphysicals seem never more at ease, more secure or happier than when they are indulging in the kind of difficulty that would have taxed to the limit the powers of an ordinary writer. Observe in this connexion the use they make of that favourite figure of the classical imitators, oxymoron. Oxymoron is the rhetorical device of coupling together words of a sharply opposite connotation, like Horace's splendide memdax. As a non-Metaphysical example of it I shall take a passage which superficially wears a Metaphysical look. It is from Phineas Fletcher:

> "A life that ever dies and death that lives,
> And, worst of all, God's absent presence gives
> A thousand living woes and dying griefs."
> (Apol. I, St. 36)

By it the poet gains a certain effect, but to the confusion of the thought. The conceit is used stiffly as a thing foreign to the true course of his matter. How little really Metaphysical it is will be readily seen from a comparison with the examples that follow, in which, instead of confusing, it points the thought vigorously, supporting and intensifying the meaning:-

> "When first my youthful, sinful days";
> (V. I, p. 198)

> "Fold up my life in love, lay it beneath
> My dear Lord's vital death ";
> (Cr. p. 106)

> "Huge emptiness!" (Cr. p. 155)

> "O you strong
> In weakness! "; (Cr. p. 58)

> "That learned and eloquent lust"; (Cr. p. 46)

> "E'en in the midst of youth and night";
> (H, p. 215)

Here it is not ornament but the native expression of their thought as it was conceived. What a poignancy it adds to Vaughan's scornful

"Brave worms and earth!", (I, p. 51)

and to Crashaw's tender

"To Thee, dread Lamb, whose love must keep
The shepherds more than they their sheep",
To Thee, meek majesty, soft King!"
(p. 72)

It is no trouble to them to write thus; they do not go out of their way to fetch in a strange beauty; the circumstance that we are not left with a cold admiration, that the conceit does not strike us as toilsome and frigid, shows how readily and naturally it came to their hand. It has all the appearance of being struck off in the heat of composition; they could not so well have expressed themselves otherwise. If there is a strangeness it is not a sought-after strangeness, an outlandish garb for an ordinary idea; if the expression is unusual, the thought is no less so. This is a very different principle from the principle involved in the conceited style generally, where, as a rule, the thought is a plain thought and all the indirection in the expression; here the thought is brought forth in its original form, the conceit goes back to the first inception. I have quoted their use of oxymoron, but that is only one variety of conceit. "When last I died", Donne breaks forth,

"When last I died, and dear, I die
As often as from thee I go",
(I, p. 18)

where, if the language seems strange, so was the thought or emotion that prompted it. The same thing is true of that comparison

worked out in such detail, of the union between his soul and the soul of his beloved to a "pair of stiff twin-compasses." It is the way his mind works. It is inevitable for him to play, and keep playing with a fancy, once he has started it:-

> "Therefore thou waked'st me wisely; yet
> My dream thou brokest not but continued it."
> (I, p. 39)

The quality of Donne's thought is strange; he thought, he imagined strangely, and his feeling winds in closely with his thought and imagination; to him, therefore, fantastic images and extraordinary metaphors came as inevitably as commonplace ones to unoriginal poets. For this reason the aptness of conceits to thought is most obvious in him. But though less original, less extraordinary, the others are no less natural, and, so to speak, happy in fitting matter and expression:

> "It was the day, Sweet, and did rise
> Not from the East but from thine eyes";
> (Cr. p. 69)

there is an exact faithfulness in the hyperbole to the shade of sentiment. The emotion is subduing in Crashaw and may conceal the oddity of expression, but even where the oddity is not concealed, as is generally the case with Cowley, the faithfulness is still exact:-

> "Virtue was thy life's centre, and from thence
> Did silently and constantly dispense
> The gentle, vigorous influence
> To all the wide and fair circumference";
> (p. 195)

> "And he who only sees in love is blind".
> (p. 142)

By nature Vaughan's mind moves with less of indirection than is common with a Metaphysical; his best work has not their core of

ingenuity; for, though he ~~is full of~~ abounds in conceits, he caught the trick of them from others,- Herbert, particularly, he follows blindly, - and the Metaphysical quality of his gift, strong in other places, is less happy in them. Still, if not where he is best, we do find ingenuity in good and characteristic work:-

> "But that great darkness at thy death
> Did make us see
> The way to thee ";
> (I, p. 134)

> "Softly rest all thy virgin crumbs!
> Lapped in the sweets of thy young breath;
> Expecting, till thy Saviour comes
> To dress them and unswaddle death."
> (I, p. 120)

and this, which is even more characteristic,-

> "The whole creation shakes off night,
> And for thy shadow looks, the light."
> (I, p. 123)

This, then, is the last broad distinction between Metaphysical and non-Metaphysical use of conceits: The Metaphysical poet is more at home in them, resorts to them more freely and familiarly, and with less of strain to his meaning.

The explanation I have given for their ease is that their meaning itself was likely to be strange and extravagant, ~~and that~~ takes us on to the relation between their genius and their style. It is evidently a closer and more serious relation than existed between the genius and style of the other writers in the conceited manner. From the examples I have given it may be seen how deeply they were imbrued, beyond all their contemporaries, in the extravagance and fantasy of conceits. The <u>dolce stil nuovo</u> charmed poets of all the schools; the Spenserians liked it for

its ornamental qualities and for the depth its paradoxes seemed to lend their thought; they cultivated its sensuous side (according to Croce the only ~~faithful~~ fruitful side for art) the side which taught them to compare Christ approaching His passion to a swan, singing as it sails to its death

> "Down the silver streams of Eridan....
> For thus, and only this, thy love did crave
> To send thee singing for us to they grave."
> (Giles Fletcher C's V.& T)

It pleased the classicists, especially the Cavaliers, for the wit and point it infused into their gallantry, for its gayety and liveliness and freedom from sentimentality. But, at least in England, the Cavaliers and such others as were attracted by it, used it lightly and only to touch off, to add flavour and piquancy to their adopted manners. Even when they carried it further, and transgress the limits of art for the sake of a piece of ingenuity, they seldom make it the actual means of conveying thought; the conceit is there for its own sake, not for the sake of the idea to be expressed.

The Metaphysicals took conceits much more seriously. Like the rest of the world they thought them valuable in themselves and introduce them where there is no excuse for them. But in general with them the conceit bears a real relation to ~~their~~ meaning. There is an actual affinity between the nature of their genius and the nature of the conceited style; both are immoderately intellectual, setting up mental activity above every canon of art. The Metaphysicals need not, though they often do, neglect pleasing the reader by words and rhythm, but their real business, their first

look-out, we gather from their use of conceits is not to soothe, not to lull, but to set the mind going and keep it going,- to surprise with their unexpectedness, to astonish with their dexterity, to overwhelm with the height and reach of their conceptions. They make of the conceited style a substantial where others make an accidental use. They employ conceits more frequently, carry them further, convey, by their means, genuine thought and emotion, and finally, by the natural aptitude they display for them, rob them, if not of their strangeness, yet of so much of their frigidity and artificality as to subdue them into adding a certain pungency and brilliancy of effect.

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CHAPTER II

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Classicist Elements

Among contempory schools and influences we have seen that in the case of conceits ~~that~~ the Metaphysical poets are more nearly related to the classicist school, with Ben Johnson at its head. This affinity of theirs to the classicists comes out not only in this one element of style; it holds for all the other elements and, beyond style, for a certain tone and attitude. The same state of mind and general attitude which finds expression tropically in conceit issues otherwise in form, diction, versification, and manner generally. As the classicists used them, conceits differ from ordinary figures not essentially as having more of the attributes, improbability, frigidity, etc., that are usually cited as giving offence, not even in incongruity. These are accidents more apt to attach to conceits than to other figures but to which all figures are liable; they are more apt to attach to conceits in classicist hands, and more yet in Metaphysical, because there their prime object is to arouse and startle the attention and to keep the mind in constant play. This ideal, intellectual energy, is a governing principle in the classicist poetic method.

If we think of the classicist reform as the beginning in English poetry of the ideals of Pope and the 18th century, as, in fact, it was, to associate with it the Metaphysicals who in most respects could not well be more opposed than they are

time to pass, [illegible] procedure to [illegible]

to everything that smacks of the century, looks to require some explanation. Though it issued ultimately only in one there are really two sides to the classicist reform. They are: the one with which we are most familiar, its tendency toward moderate ideas, unimaginative good sense, rule and regulation; and the other, which is after all perhaps only another face of the same thing, its high-spirited intellectualism, its masculine force, its brilliant play of ideas. Energy and impatience with illusion turn in time to prose and commonplace; it is a dangerous principle in poetry to address the intellect over the head of the emotions and the imagination and on that principle our classicist poetry split; but it was a principle, which, when Johnson espoused it, had at least the merit of necessity. And it will readily be seen that with classicism on its second side, or perhaps I had better say, in its earlier manifestation, the Metaphysical poets would have ~~plenty of~~ not a few points of contact.

In its first manifestation classicism was largely a ~~matter~~ pure of pure reaction. The revival of classic literature, ~~as people say~~, gave its first impulse to the renaissance; but the progress of classic literature, when it was closely enough studied for its true spirit to emerge and act, which concluded the renaissance. At least it concluded that part of it we think of as glorious in literature: in one sense we are still living in the renaissance. Our great renaissance literature is not classic; all the classics did was to touch fire to the stored materials of the middle ages; when classical knowledge matured

it gave itself to extinguishing the blaze which by then was dying of itself.

In Jonson's day a great reaction had set in against the romantic poetry of the renaissance, and with good reason; it was growing into a convention. One can very well understand how to vigorous-minded, clear-sighted man who had taken account of modern ideas and learning, not all its sweetness, not all its nobility, not all its charm could save Elizabethan lyrism from being a burden. Spenser, the lyrists, the madrigalists, the sonnetteers, had addressed themselves so exclusively to the heart and imagination with their singing tunes, their ungirt spontanity, their lofty and unreal sentiment, that they ended by exhausting the heart & the imagination ~~them~~, and the intellect reasserted itself. Men like Donne had got a long way beyond "Hey nonny, nonny". They were naturally impatient with this persistent evasion of reality, this dreamy bookishness, this unrestrained emotionalism. These and the other exalted defects of the older verse engendered reaction; its faults and hardly less its attractions were of the kind bound to fail with the next generation; even sensuous beauty palls in time. p. 56 Rom. etc

The ~~failure of~~ one strain too exclusively played upon, enough in itself to induce a strong desire for an opposite strain, this negative cause reinforced by all the new forces of the age - its ~~a~~ positive admiration of the classical literature and sympathy for antique civic ideals, for the antique view of life, - brought about a reaction so intense that writers in the new style were not content merely with abandoning old literary ideals they ~~but~~ actually persecuted them. Classicist ideals are not the same with

classical; they are classical plus impatience with romantic ideals; that is, they are classical with less of ease, of moderation and of proportioned beauty; the too near presence of romantic ideals has displaced the classical accent. Classicists had to destroy with one hand and build up with the other. Consequently, from the classical ideal the classicist picked out those elements for imitation that were chiefly opposed to romanticism.

In the classical ideal the elements chiefly opposed to romanticism are (1) Mental activity, (2) Sense of reality, (3) Structure, (4) eloquence of speech, as opposed to simple tunefulness. With these four weapons Ben and his sons brought down the whole renaissance - romantic structure. Romanticism may be defined as a clouding of reality in the interests of poetry and beauty. It operates in a field remote from actual life; its purpose is to persuade us to let go our hold on actual life, and since the main strength of this hold lies in the intellectual part of us, the region of clear ideas, the first part of the romantic procedure is to relax the alertness of the mind by winning upon it with the full enchantment of colour, of slow music, of congruous sweet imagry. Romantic poetry, ~~as a kind of~~ magic, begins by weaving about the reader a rhythmic spell; in its versification it makes use of all the tricks of the ~~black~~ er art, and first of soothing rhythms, monotonous repetitions, subdued rime, meaningless refrains. By ~~means~~ of a simply sensuous music which undermines meaning by accompanying it as the notes accompany the words of a song, it induces a dreamy state of consciousness, lulling us out of our habitual wakefulness. It will be remembered that romantic versification

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with Tochonian poetry.
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differs essentially from classic in being founded upon the measures of the popular dance, in which the music and rhythm are everything, sense and meaning as chance may send. Thus in a romantic poem one accepts without question strange moods and impossible situations in a romantic poem which presented in any other medium would make one incredulous and impatient. The diction of romantic poetry as carefully as the rhythm avoids rousing the intellectual faculty. It chooses words that by long association with poetic occupations and poetic moods and with poetry itself have acquired a charm which is independent of their meaning; words whose sound is pleasing, or which are clung about by an atmosphere of antique grace. And these words the romantic poet combines to convey obscure images, or vague sentiments, obscure and vague, but on that account the more poignant and ~~powerful~~ moving. For its subject matter romanticism prefers emotional states, or narrative, or descriptions of nature; it never deals with ideas by themselves. And Such ideas as it ~~makes~~ does use of ~~do not~~ exhibit little original thought; they are generally the imposing commonplaces, rethought by each human soul, truths that have passed from the realm of ideas into the realm of emotion, and so leave the intellect passive. With these go the noble chivalric conventions of love and honour and the yet nobler Platonic conventions and manners fitted to a better and fairer world than ours, and everywhere the dreaming mind is guarded against the shock of meeting with reality. And These are the ~~props~~ spells of romantic beauty; singing ryhthms, a sensuous and conventional diction, a fixed nobility of sentiment and flight from modern and actual life.

It is a poetic ideal in which good and bad are mixed together, even as an ideal, but in Jonson's time its good was running to seed, and its faults growing in consequence less tolerable. As a realistic dramatist he was offended by every phase of it; he detested its negligent superfluity of syllables, its feminine sweetness, its noble proprieties, its overwrought illusions, its sentimental and non-intellectual appeal, and to put it down he bent his energies to inaugurating a new style ~~into the language~~. He set up classic standards. The substance of classic poetry, as interpreted ~~fairly~~, I think, ~~fairly interpreted~~ by Ben Jonson, is in its secular and manly spirit, its genuine intellectual play, its just sense of reality. The beauty of its style is a plastic beauty; that is, a beauty that consists mainly in purity and strength of outline, in the proportion of parts and in firm modelling; another beauty altogether from the romantic, depends on music & detail. Indeed in every point of classic excellence romanticism is deficient, and, judged by classic standards, ~~it~~ romanticism is weak, exaggerated, wasteful, and false. With his eye upon the classics, Jonson set to work to reform versification and to infuse into verse a manlier spirit. He began by rejecting a vocabulary that relied on antiquity and poetic conventions for its favour, and, by Horace's advice, substituted for it words current in good modern conversation. He economized syllables rigorously and thereby gained a compact vigour for his lines, which vigour which he strengthened by setting his style upon the antique base of ~~spoken~~ eloquence, that knows nothing of "undersongs" but, however impassioned, is, in its clear rationality, only a heightened form of speech; its accent coincides with the sense, and its

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pauses are accommodated to the sense. And he filled out his lines with honest matter instead of sweet vocables. The Petrarchan, the Arcadian, even the Platonic, altitudes he discarded as so much rubbish; to a mind like his they were unsympathetic; and, though Jonson is by no means destitute of nobility, it is the outcome in him not of a convention, but of his own generous conceptions.

Most of these changes in the poetic code the Metaphysical poets, like the Cavaliers and the rest of the tribe of Ben, accepted with alacrity. I attribute their inauguration to Ben Jonson, and he is in fact their great champion and exemplar. But the same kind of spirit must have been abroad and not confined to him; there are plenty of traces of it in Shakespeare, in the sonnets, even; and Donne, who is Jonson's contemporary, is filled with it. But in Donne and the other Metaphysicals it issues in a form that separates them from the ordinary classicist. In the form of it peculiar to themselves the classicist spirit is the second most important element in Metaphysical poetry; it denotes an attitude, a frame of mind, as well as a theory of style; it influences not only their versification, their diction, their figures and such things, but also the way in which they approach a subject, the mood in which they treat it, - in a word - their philosophy of poetry.

What distinguishes their acceptance of classicist principles consists in no modification of the principles themselves but in the fierce and extreme way in which they welcomed them; they put them into practice so inexorably, pushed them so far, drove them so hard, that in accepting, they almost destroyed them. They

attempted classicism, at the same time throwing moderation and proportion (necessary ingredients) to the winds. The classicists proper had, as I said, noticeably less of proportion and moderation than their classic models; they were disturbed by the presence of opposing ideals; but, compared with the offences committed by the Metaphysicals, theirs are very little sins indeed. The classicists condemned the fictions of the romanticists from the point of view of men of the world; their interests were human and mundane and they had no time to lose themselves in fairy tale wanderings in woods, or protracted sighing over cruel ladies; they feel the pressure of reality and the hurrying of "time's winged chariot"; they are of Marvell's mind:-

> "Let us roll all our strength and all
> Our sweetness up into one ball,
> And tear our pleasures with rough strife
> Through the iron gates of life." [1]

But the Metaphysicals, whose interests are not human and mundane, despise and condemn the romantic mood not because it is remote from life so much as because it veils and beautifies an ugliness it is essential for us to know; because it hides the truth of things, calling lust love, earthly beauty heavenly, ambition the love of glory, worldly prudence honour and so on, covering poor filth with gilt and glamour; and since their hatred is intellectual, it is so much the more ruthless. Their style is in every point a fighting protest, impelled almost purely by an angry disdain for romanticism, far less

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1. Poems, p. 57.

[illegible]

tempered than with the classicists by a reverence for the literature of Greece and Rome. ¶ The classicists accented, but the Metaphysicals lay all their stress on the four points I have noted, - mental activity, sense of reality, structure and eloquent~~ce of speech~~; and where the classicist accent was perhaps rather on the last two points, the formal elements, the Metaphysical was rather on the two first. ¶ Their position toward these formal elements is complex. One would expect a strong sense of the requirements of structure, involving, as it does, an exact ~~government~~ management of material, ~~taken~~ that in conjunction with the sense of responsibility laid upon one by an adherence to the form of direct speech which allows the poet no liberty in his capacity of inspired bard, ~~but~~ holds him accountable for all his words, - one would expect ~~that such a sense would have~~ ~~their structure~~ these exercised to a certain restraint, and put a check upon caprice and license. But apparently, since caprice and license in Metaphysical poetry show no signs of having any restraint put upon them - freedom from any kind of bondage whatever seeming to be in the very air it breathes - it does not exercise such a check; and so one might be led to conclude that is not really present. Yet that ~~it is~~ both are present must be concluded from the unity and concision of the Metaphysical lyric, and from their unmistakable tone of direct utterance. ¶ The explanation seems to lie in the violence of Metaphysical exaggeration and in the difference of their point of view from the classicist point of view. While the classicists paid attention to the right disposition of their material with an eye to its beauty as a

[illegible]

whole, and adopted eloquence in the place of melody as a base of verse in order to gain rapidity and strength, and increase the vividness of their effects; the Metaphysicals, following and exaggerating the same methods, did so with small concern for ideals of classic form; far above form they placed as ideals intellectual energy and scorn of illusion, which, though also classic ideals, thus violently displaced, work havoc with the prior ideals of restraint and proportion.

For the Metaphysicals the two second points really come under the head of the two first, and though they may be considered as instances of Metaphysical exaggeration of classicist principles, yet, since it is also possible to consider them as phases of still more dominant characteristics, for the sake of unity it would be better to take them that way. We may say then that the Metaphysicals modified classicist principles, (1) by subordinating the~~ir~~ formal elements to the~~ir~~ more general elements of cl style, and (2) by enormously exaggerating these more general elements. As a result, in spite of its close relation to the classicist movement, the Metaphysical school is at the opposite pole from the sort of composition in which that movement ultimately and ~~logically~~ naturally found expression. But it seems strange that a movement destined to produce Pope should have branched out first in such wild shoots as Donne and Cowley,

~~Wit~~ mental activity:-The style of the Metaphysicals is governed and guided by the classicist presumptions that a stirring and lively manner, showing that the writer has good active brains and a strong

This is overlooking
the matter

and [illegible] grief in [illegible]

grasp upon fact, ~~that he is~~ the opposite of mooning poet, or a retired soul dreaming over a book in a corner, that this manner is the only proper one for high poetry. And, since they are driven on by a spirit that flies high over the heads of ordinary classicist interests, a spirit that has thrown off every regular restraint (I shall come to speak of this presently) they carry out the manner to the last limit of daring. Where the classicist strives to stimulate his reader, the Metaphysical exerts himself to shock and dazzle him, to leave him no peace or a moment of relaxation, to keep his mind stretched to its livliest pitch, excited, alert; he makes him few sensuous concessions and these never at the expense of vigour; he is ready to sacrifice beauty, sweetness, congruity, grace - whatever makes for poetical peace and pleasure - if the sacrifice will gain him the least accession of energy. And as the energy he desires is an intellectual energy, not emotional, or emotional only in so far as emotion may be expressed in the terms of intellect, he ~~practically~~ comes to disregard ~~all~~ most ordinary poetical proprieties. ~~whatever.~~

~~With classicist realism~~ Realism he is equally reckless. Reference is often made to Metaphysical fantasy as though it were somehow a product of the fantastic fictions of the middle ages. As a matter of fact it would be hard to exaggerate Metaphysical scorn ~~for the~~ romantic marvels and long-winded allegory. It is precisely the Metaphysicals who blew loudest on the trumpet which brought down the walls of that lovely unreal city raised by renaisance magic out of the buried middle ages; on their fantastic

But in most but confound the zeroes of fantastic;

side the middle ages had no more determined foes. But they have a side with which the Metaphysicals have a genuine connexion, - their prosaic and almost literal realism; in their treatment of fact they share the medieval simplicity, grossness and exactitude, and also the medieval fearlessness of prose. But the Metaphysical concern for fact is overlooked; it is overlaid by his apparent scorn for all mundane affairs, and apparently contradicted by those flights of fantastic wit the purpose of which seems to be to outrage probability. The two things are, however, to be kept separate; juggling with words and sleights of logic are quite compatible with an honest and literal faithfulness; they are conjoined in the medieval schoolman. Their realism is I think one of their most valuable and important contributions; it will not be until a long time after that we meet a psychological study like Donne's Elegies, or a delicately close observation such as distinguishes Vaughan in all his dealings with natural objects.

Formal Elements of Style

The conjunction of intellectual energy with realism is responsible for all the good and all the bad in Metaphysical style. In treating of the formal elements of that style it will be more convenient to take the two together, though it can be made out that in metrical matters energy is the dominating principle, while in diction, and syntax realism prevails. I shall, however, not try to draw any hard and fast distinction here, though when it comes to actual content and more general quali-

ties of style, for the sake of clearness, I shall divide them again.

Perhaps the surest indication of the character of a poetic movement is to be found in its versification; which being more unconscious, admits less of affectation than does diction, and so sooner betrays the author's true temper. In the fundamentals of rhythm it is impossible to seem other or better than one is. But the delicate variations in rhythm are produced by variations in the individual soul; where there is a question of a number of poets one is compelled to base one's judgment on more gross and obvious points. So in the two following specimens of classicist and Metaphysical poetry which I choose as typical of the qualities of the two schools and the differences between them I shall keep out of sight as far as possible what is Jonson or Donne exclusive of their respective schools. Though Donne may sometimes be less characteristically Metaphysical, Jonson is seldom more so, and on the whole the poems seem to me a fair representation of the two manners. Take Jonson first:-

> 'High-spirited friend,
> I send nor balm nor cor'sives to your wound:
> Your fate hath found
> A gentler and more agile hand to tend
> The cure of that which is but corporal;
> And doubtful days which were named critical,
> Have made their fairest flight
> And now are out of sight.
> Yet doth some wholesome physic for the mind
> Wrapped in this paper lie,
> Which in the taking if you misapply,
> You are unkind."
>
> (The Noble Balm)

Except that the classicists are not very prone to irregularity

J. Mellon's [illegible]
Prospect of Rome.

in the lengths of their lines this stanza illustrates very well their manner of versification: it is eloquent without being musical, active and direct in tone, opening dramatically; the accentuation invariably follows the sense which fills the stanza as a whole, not confining itself to the line upon line arrangement; the phrasing varies in length as in prose, the rimes are firm and the whole well and compactly put together. Now consider Donne:-

> "'Tis the year's midnight, and it is the day's
> Lucy's, who scarce herself seven hours unmasks;
> The sun is spent, and now his flasks
> Send forth light squibs, no constant rays;
> The world's whole sap is sunk;
> The general balm the hydroptic earth hath drunk,
> Whither, as to the bed's feet, life is shrunk,
> Dead and interr'd; yet all these seem to laugh,
> Compared with me, who am their epitaph."
> (I, p. 45)

His stanza resembles the other in each respect; it is eloquent, not musical, active and dramatic; the sense is free to pass out of the line, the rimes furnish support to the whole well-built stanza. It is like, but with the likeness of caricature. Jonson's lines are vigorous, but Donne's are violent in their compression; they are wanting in the measured dignity of Jonson's, their eloquence lying only in their vigour, Jonson's syntax is close but Donne's, what with elipsis, over-compression, and inversion, passes into an all but inextricable obscurity. The accent follows the prose sense, but of a harsh and abrupt kind of prose, with slips in its links; the rimes are too prominent. As a whole it has a perfect unity so far as the meaning goes, but of poetic unity of form and exterior charm not an iota; that has been sacrificed, together with ease and sweetness, to en-

hance the effect of energy. And, it must be admitted whatever the price, Donne certainly has attained what he was after; the stanza is compact of energy. His piece has more force, - for one reason, because it contains more matter than Jonson's, - though that is full enough. In his stanza Jonson conveys this much:- He is sending to a friend, wounded on some honourable occasion, a medicine not meant to cure his bodily pains, for them he has a more tender nurse, and fortunately is no longer in danger, but a medicine for his mind, which he is warned not to misunderstand. That is a good deal of plain matter for 12 lines of verse to carry; but in fewer Donne packs as much more. He tells us in effect that it is S. Lucy's Day at noon, the the shortest day, and, as it were, the midnight of the year, being but a day of 7 hours; that the sun flickers doubtfully in a dull sky, dead like the world whose life has been sucked down to its centre, the earth having drunk up what was meant for all, and drained away and lost the sources of life. Yet compared to his grief this state of desolation is no less than joy; for if the world is dead, his life is but the slight label of death.

The greatest difference of all between the two pieces is in their substance, which shows the operation of two different orders of mind, the one, plain and straightforward, the other intense, subtle, curious; But to continue with what more exterior. As regards their rhythm both poems are written in contempt of the standards of the earlier lyric; both are a standing reproach to its careless sweetness, its fluency and diffuseness; and in no danger of falling into the jog-trot

regularity, or the weakly sweet cadences, which are the pitfalls of that style, ( ) they attain an equal distance from its charms and its defects. (Through adopting at each point an opposite method.) (1) A sharp conflict between verse and sense accent, so that the former is often all but lost; (2) Breaking the line and shifting the accent and caesura before the ear has time to grow accustomed to one tempo; (3) Avoiding repetition and variations - the source of much of the allurement of the Elizabethan lyric (or of all poetry); (4) Strong sense-accent on the rime word; (5) Elimination of weak syllables and "background" generally; (6) Dearth of ornament; (7) Abrupt beginnings. Both follow this anti-romantic system, but notice, in each instance, how much more violent in the assertion of ~~their~~ principles Donne is than Jonson; Jonson never once approaches such a piece of poetic bravado as Donne's "Lucy's", but keeps his conflicts within the bounds of propriety; (2) His caesura is comparatively regular; is regularity itself by the side of Donne's, in not one of whose lines does it fall again in the same place; (3) While neither has anything like a refrain or a piece of verbal repetition, Donne would have thrown out, as dispensable to the sense, the two phrases, "which were named critical", and "and now are out of sight"; (4) Donne's rime is stronger through the use he makes of words like "flasks", "shrunk", "epitaph", which are stronger in themselves. (5) Almost every word in Donne tends to thrust itself into the foreground; his only light words consist of the necessary connectives, and these he is inclined to cut down as close as possible; he goes so far in this direction as sometimes to lose the undulation essential even to

good prose; no art would consent to the unbroken plainness of "the world's whole sap is sunk", or of "send forth light squibs". This ~~economy~~ parsimonious use of light and unnoticeable elements is very characteristic of Metaphysical writing; it is due in part to their liking for a weighted diction, -Or rather weight both in diction and versification is serviceable to them because it gives the effect of the preponderance of thought, matter, over mere form. There ~~are plenty~~ is no lack of such lines as Donne's to be found in them all, even, though less frequently, in the musical Crashaw, e.g., his

> "Other men's hunger with strange feasts I quelled,
> My own with stranger fasts "; (p. 237)

in Herbert~~'s~~ ,-

> "The stormie, working soul spits lies and froth"; (p.4)

in Vaughan~~'s~~

> "Thy six-days' building beat"; (p.28)

~~and~~ in Cowley~~'s~~

> "When all's done, life's an incurable disease".

But to return to our comparison. (6) Both stanzas, ~~and~~ are, in general, both classicist and Metaphysical poetry, ~~is~~ are chary of prettiness; ~~it~~ and affect~~s~~ an extreme plainness and entire independence of decorative elements, the sense standing on its own feet; its sole support, wit, ~~is~~ being only a~~nother~~ one form of sense. But Donne does not even allow himself such plays as Jonson's "corporal" and "critical", or the "g's" in "gentler" and "agile" or such nice fingering of vowel and consonant throughout. He will have nothing that might soften his meaning, or even derogate in the slightest in~~terfere with~~ from the effect of sheer force. (7) Both begin without

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preliminaries; but Donne's, though not like Jonson's (a direct address) opens still more abruptly; ~~it~~ plunges into the mood and situation without explanation, even ~~an~~ implied ~~one~~, and the effect of dramatic excitement this produces is also extremely characteristic of Metaphysical writing. It forms one expression of their principle of intellectual energy, and I shall say more of it when I come to deal more with that.

~~As I began began by saying~~ I take these two stanzas to be representative. There are variations in individuals, but on the whole what is true of this stanza of Donne's is true of the school. Its versification is founded on classicist principles, not upon new or peculiar principles of its own invention. Their inventiveness as a school (this of course says nothing as to the separate feats of Donne, or of Herbert and Crashaw) consists in an exaggeration of classicist principles in the sole interest of intellectual energy.

I ought here to ~~speak a word of~~ mention their conceits ~~which are an~~ as another instance of the exaggeration of the classicist principle of liveliness made in the interest of intellectual energy. The prime object of a conceit is to startle the attention. They are addressed to the merely intellectual part of us, the part which it is the object of the usual kind of romantic poetry to decoy out of its alertness. They break in upon and prevent that state of emotional peace and pleasure which we feel it is the business of poetry to induce. That is why we may take pleasure in ~~a~~ prose conceits ~~as~~, for example, ~~in~~ Lamb's[2] and are annoyed by them in poetry.

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2. See especially the description of the legless man in the Complaint on the Decay of Beggars. It is "Metaphysical" prose.

They are a gad-fly, stinging kind of figure; naturally we resent them; though a slight sting, in a style of honey-sweetness may add to its pleasantness, - ~~one~~ the reason, ~~I~~ is at least one of the reasons do not doubt, why the followers of Spenser, as possessed as he with sensuous beauty, introduced occasional conceits into theirs. But to make a business of them as did the Metaphysicals, searching out those that gave the intellect most trouble, is among their plainest indications that ~~emotional~~ aesthetic peace ~~and pleasure~~ form small part of the Metaphysical canon of poetry. ¶ If the base of romantic verse is tunefulness, and of classic measured eloquence, the base of Metaphysical verse ~~is~~ comes very near being prose. This they are able at times to work into a very passionate and moving variety of prose, -(nor do I deny them to have many passages of pure eloquence, and occasionally of sheer singing quality as in Donne's Break of Day:-

> "Stay, O sweet, and do not rise;
> The light that shines comes from ~~mine~~ the eyes;
> The day breaks not, it is my heart", - (p.22)

but these are occasional and due as it were to lapses ~~to~~ in theory) but their characteristic base remains tuneless and rhythmless; and saved, when saved, by something else, - emotion, ~~spirit~~ the moment, height of imagination.

¶ Diction With this prose versification they combine a diction that is too daring and effective to be called prosaic, but which nevertheless is the poles apart from what we call a "poetic diction". Jonson closed the doors of his vocabulary against ~~those~~ all words, still lovely, but whose meaning had faded out of them, and which savoured of antiquity, and opened them, ~~with~~ on the recom-

mendation of Horace, to the current speech of good urban usage. The Metaphysicals followed suit; they excluded the antique and "poetic" and depended for their most striking and singular effects upon words whose strength lay in themselves, not in their associations. But, as usual, they went further. Beside the words in ordinary use, they welcomed in a motley crowd of terms which had never seen the light of poetry before, and for the most part, not since. Technical terms from every kind of trade and business, the cant of the professions, learned and scientific language, the language of text-books, of the universities, of the court, of the city, - not good spoken usage but only modernity is their criterion. They even admit a few poetic terms provided they are sufficiently modern, - words like "sugar'd" and "cabinet". Modernity is one important phase of realism; ~~it~~ creating what does an honest speaking atmosphere, destructive to convention. They go as far beyond Jonson as, to revert to our examples, "squibs", "hydroptic", and "bed's-feet" pass beyond "high-spirited" and "critical". By affecting at the same time a syntax, as much more familiarly conversational than Jonson's, they reach a result, by them much coveted, of unexampled plainness and candour, which has the effect of brushing away whatever might come between them and their reader, or between their thought and the expression of it. On occasion this plainness becomes simple ugliness, - Herbert's pitfall:-

> "Sin is that press and vice which forceth pain
> To hunt his cruel food through every vein", (p. 137)

but even this, on occasion, has its uses. Ugliness for its own sake is a romantic principle; the Metaphysicals neither shun nor

affect it, but they are glad of anything that helps to rid them of the veils of poetic illusion. Great plainness is good to rout a clouded connotation, which, like a captivating rhythm, steals away our rational senses, - ~~that faculty which it is the aim of Metaphysical poetry to stimulate and keep in condition~~. This would explain the harshness ~~as~~ such passages as these ~~following~~:-

"When our hard hearts have took up stones to brain thee" (p. 41)

"But when thou dost on business blow
It hangs, it clogs;
Not all the teams of Albion in a row
Can hale it out of door"; (p.79)

"On whose raw arms stiff feathers now begin". (D.I, p. 157)

"His flesh is jelly yet and his bones thread". (D.II,p.157)

"A noisome spring of sores as thick as leaves
~~did~~ did sprout". (Cw. p. 224)

It is Herbert who is most exactly technical:-

"And just it is that I should pay the rent
Because the benefit accrues to me"; (p. 143)

"No screw, no piercer can
Into a piece of timber work and wind,
As God's afflictions into man"; (p. 156)

"Could not the wisdom which first broached the wine
Have thickened it with definitions?" (p. 166) etc.

But even here, where they are far from their best, it will be seen that their fear of the "poetic" is not all loss. Their plainness is forcible like the Bible's:-

"Bring bone to bone, and rebuild man", - (V.p. 181)

and is by them made a source of power.

[illegible]

[illegible] put it [illegible]

Other Elements in Style

It is difficult to draw a sharp line between the formal elements of style and its more intangible elements as it is to distinguish sharply between style and content, all three are inextricably bound up together; yet if we are to analyze at all, we are forced to make these divisions. Diction and versification are bound to contribute the lion's share to the other expressions of the same principles, but asking the reader to notice them for himself, I shall neglect them in treating those other manifestations.

I. Intellectual Energy

1. Immediateness: The air that usually hangs about religious poetry and, indeed, about any verse thoughtful and meditative in character, has a quality - it is difficult to define it - a brooding quality, a quality of slow lingering thought. The face of such poetry is set toward the past, or aspires, over great stretches of time, toward a distant future. It may speak of present grief, but not in present terms, its mood is either regretful or aspiring. One of the most individual things about Metaphysical poetry, the bulk of which is religious, is its utter freedom from this atmosphere. The air that hangs about Metaphysical poetry is in active motion. The mood in which they write is the opposite from the elegiac mood; it is vivid and immediate present. If we speak of poetry having a "tense" theirs is cast in "the living present". It voices regrets and aspirations, but its tone is neither aspiring nor regretful; it voices them as matters of intense, present

interest. ~~One feels the pressure of immediate concern just as one feels it in the Cavalier lyric, as though thought were wrought up to a certain pitch.~~ Take this stanza, (it is from Vaughan, and I quote ~~him~~ because, one of his best-known poems seems to contradict what I have just been saying, and because, since he is by nature of a really meditative temper, that he should adopt the tone shows how much a part of the canon it is):-

> "Peace? and to all the world? Sure One,
> And He the Prince of Peace, had none!
> He travels to be born, and then
> Is born to travel more again.
> Poor Galilee! thou canst not be
> The place for His Nativity.
> His restless mother's call'd away,
> And not deliver'd till she pay." (11, p.259)

It also excellently illustrates other forms of lyric lines their natural propensity for puns, and plays; ~~these are also a source of its liveliness~~, but ~~the~~ liveliness I now wish to illustrate, and these there is the is that of the general tone, which is questioning, exclamatory, excited, dramatic.

Dramatic is the ~~best~~ most inclusive word; ~~it includes the rest.~~ Their active tone passes frequently into outright drama; the poem assumes the form of a problem, opening upon a situation and closing with its solution, the body of it taken up with a genuine struggle between opposing elements. Herbert carries out the scheme completely even to casting the whole in dialogue form. A poem of his may begin in one mood and end in a different one, the change being ~~given~~ recorded in the act of its occurrence, with none of the violence of the conflict lost. I suppose the most truly dramatic lyric ever written is Herbert's <u>Collar</u>:-

"I struck the board, and cry'd, No more!
I will abroad.
What! shall I ever sigh and pine?
My lines and life are free; free as the road;
Loose as the wind, and large as store....
Sure there was wine,
Before my sighs did dry it; there was corn,
Before my tears did drown it....
Away! take heed;
I will abroad.
Call in thy death's head there; tie up thy fears.
He that forbears ~~to suit and serve his need~~
To suit and serve his need
Deserves his load.
But as I rav'd and grew more fierce and wild
At every word,
Methought I heard one calling, Childe;
And I replied, My Lord." (p. 192)

Here, in this poem, even in the mutilated form in which I have given it, are gathered all the elements of dramatic art. It breaks in abruptly upon the situation, moves rapidly to a climax, maintaining an atmosphere of tense excitement, and in order to keep up this atmosphere of interest and excitement, employs the actual devices of dramatic speech, - broken exclamations, quick volleys of questions, sharp inversions, colloquial grammar and diction. Dramatic interest rests on much the same ground as conceits, i.e., surprise.

All these devices, though not usually so many at the same time, the Metaphysical poet felt himself as free to make use of as any dramatist. I have not space to go into it, but it is evident that the stage had a strong influence on these writers, not the pastoral and romantic drama, but the realistic; in drama, it is interesting to note, divided in the same two ~~streams~~ opposites as non-dramatic poetry. The Metaphysicals convey the dramatic impression that something vital and important hangs on the outcome of

their speculations; they write in the midst of action, not like secluded poets, idly. / Donne's object might be dramatic characterization, to create his own character in his poetry, no explanation; he will not pass a word unless it is stamped with idiosyncrasy. ~~The body of their work~~ Their tone is keyed up, ~~pitched almost too high;~~ they all of them delight in openings which, for dramatic interest, might have been cut from the climax of a play. They employ the vigorous vocabulary, the strong, supple versification, the prose accent, the impassioned rhetoric, the modern comparisons and reference of speeches made in the clash of dramatic circumstances. What could be more in the ~~tone~~ spirit of drama, of Shakespearian tragedy, than these openings of Donne's:-

> "So, so, break off this last lamenting kiss
> That sucks two souls and vapours both away". (I.73)

When[4] not like this[3] drama in essence, their poetry contains many of the characteristics of drama. Much in Crashaw is as instant, as vivid, as pleading as, let us say, the utterances of Constance:-

> "Come once the conquering way, not to confute
> But kill the rebel-word, irresolute"; (p. 59)

> "Live in these conquering leaves; live all the same;
> And walk through all tongues one triumphant flame.
> Live here great heart; and love, and die, and kill;
> And bleed and wound; and yield and conquer still." (p.140)

And Cowley, though seldom with any true passion, often follows the form of drama:-

> "What have we done? what cruel passion moved thee,
> Thus to ruin her that lov'd thee"; (p. 147)

> "'Tis a strange kind of ignorance this in you!" etc.
> (p. 141)

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3. Consider also this:-

> "When last I died and
> As often as from thee I go;" (Vol.1, p.18)

and - Though I be dead and buried yet I have
> Living in you - court enough in my grave." (D.II, p.53)

and Herbert, pp. 95, 123, 140, 161, 192

In still other respects the effects of dramatic influence will be perceived; in their repetitions for emphasis (not music)—

"Wherefore I dare not, I...."; (H.p.201)

in their leaning toward the sententious:-

"All are Stoics in the grave"; (Cw. p. 56)

"A sweet self-privacy in a right soul
Outruns the earth and lines the utmost pole"; (V.I.p.96)

"If reason move not, gallants, quit the room;
(All in a shipwreck move their several ways)" (H.p.3)

and in their rapid and eliptical syntax. I attribute these things to the influence of the dramatic style, but it is not possible to tell certainly whether ~~impacts~~ they are indebted to that or simply to their own principle of intellectual energy, a principle dominant also in drama.

2. Invention:- This is as good a name as I can find for the most striking, or at least the most obvious, side of the Metaphysical genius, but it is not to be taken in the most flattering sense. In the 18th century they meant by invention the same thing we now speak of as the creative imagination. I mean nothing so grand. The function of the creative imagination is to discern the true nature of the object through every veil of circumstance. The function of the inventive faculty is to invent out of its own stores, taking no more from the object, whatever it is, than the impulse that sets off the train of their own fancy. What it desires to exhibit is not the object in its true colours, but the richness, variety, scope, ingeniousness of the mind ~~that~~ views the object. The operation of the poet's intellect is regarded as infinitely more important and valuable and poetic than any exterior, merely actual, piece of experience; what may be said

about a thing as more important than the thing itself. Their subject serves them as a kind of springing-board from which they dive off to explore the wonders of their own ~~well-stocked~~ intelligences. On the slightest pretext they bring forth treasures of knowledge, observation, learning, whatever they have, pearls and sea-weed, and lay them before the reader with an air of satisfaction,—a content which most readers nowadays are far from sharing. But Dr. Johnson was wrong when he said that to show their learning was their whole endeavor; he mistakes the result for the aim. It is not their learning they are endeavoring to show but their powers of mind. Learned as they are, they possess more observation than learning, which they are no less anxious to exhibit; but both only secondarily; both serving simply as signs of the strength, dexterity and untiring activity of their intellectual faculty.

This theory of their procedure accounts for much which most readers find distasteful ~~offensive~~ in their practise. It accounts for the weight of their learned reference; (Milton, who has a still heavier weight of it, because he brings it in on a more valid principle, passes unblamed); it accounts, and not any special interest in the sciences themselves,[4] for a hundred allusions to the newly developed natural sciences:-

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4. This shows how necessary it is to distinguish poetic theory from practice. Phineas Fletcher founded a long allegory on human physiology, especially dwelling on Harvey's discovery of the blood-system; yet Fletcher is a romanticist of the romanticists; he was only looking for fresh material for allegory.

"Frogs marry fish and flesh; bats bird and beast;
Sponges non-sense and sense; mines the earth and
plants." (H.p.148)

"Next day repairs - but ill- last day's decay".
(D.II, p.140)

"But as in mithradate or just perfumes,
Where all good things being met, nopne presumes
To govern," (D.II,p.131)

"As doth the pith, which lest our bodies slack,
Strings fast the little bones of neck and back;"
(D.II,p.134)

It would be wrong to conclude anything from this use of scientific similes more than that science came in for its share of their learned attention; just as it would be wrong to conclude from the presence of philosophic and metaphysical similes any very special predilection for scholastic learning. They use one kind as familiarly as the other:

"Love's passives are his activ'st part"; (Cr.p.140)

"Whose definition is a doubt
'Twixt life and death"; (Cr.p.58)

and mingle scholastic physics with modern impartially -

"As to our eyes the forms from objects flow" - (D.II, 31)

pleases them no better than

"By repercussion beams engender fire". (Cw.p.108)

And they are as familiar with mathematics as with scholastic philosophy and modern natural science:-

"To whose proportions if we would compare
Cubes, they are unstable, circles angular". (D.II,p.141)

All learning is grist to their mill, and of learning they do not require that it possess academic respectibility. They are equally tolerant of the working sciences, of the sciences of fortification

r artillery[5],
and ~~was for example~~[5] of tradesman knowledge, and of supposed knowledge as of real. Astrology serves their turn as well as astronomy, and "vulgar errors" as well as propositions Bacon would put his seal to; nothing comes amiss to them. Nothing, that is, except the one accepted source for all poetic simile, - classic mythology and romance legend. I do not suppose there could be more unexceptional evidence than this omission to show how complete, how principled, was their reaction against romantic verse. In their eyes to turn to classic mythology for a comparison would be a piece of simple weak-mindedness.

Too much learning, especially technical and scientific learning, is always out of place in poetry; it offends us because it pins us down to the world we know and are not anxious to remember ~~want to forget~~; but though their learning is offensive, the offence, here as generally, with the Metaphysicals, is intentional; they are an anxious to hold us down to the world in its ungilded condition as we are to get away from it, - but more of this later. More than by the learning itself we are offended by the use to which they put it. For the faults in taste prevalent in this poetry are likewise due to their stress upon the inventive faculty. Bad taste in comparisons is due to a neglect of emotional congruity, ~~and this~~ is bound to suffer when the connexion between the comparison and the thing compared is, as, simply a mental one. The connexion may be real and reasonable but if it brings up a different set of

---as, for example,---

5. "Think that a rusty piece, discharged, is flown
In pieces and the bullet is his own
And freely flies." (2 D. 133; also VI,p.31)

emotional associations we can not help being distressed and displeased with the ingenuity. Thus, the outburst of buds and thick pressure of plant-life is certainly a characteristic of spring, on the mental side perhaps the best comparison available. But when Cowley uses it to illustrate the great plague of ulcers and swellings which Moses brought on the Egyptians, we wish he wouldn't; our sensibilities are shocked by such a line as

> "A noisome Spring of Sores, as thick as Leaves did sprout"; (p.224)

we have a different set of associations with the spring. Herbert does worse than shock us, he makes us smile:-

> "God gave thy soul brave wings; put not those feathers
> Into a bed to sleep out all ill weathers". (H.p.5)

This is the kind of thing people hold up against the Metaphysicals, forgetting that a poetic principle may work more ways than one. While A mental comparison may, ~~but it~~ need not conflict with emotional congruity, and the principle which leads them to search out new and original matters of comparison is good. It puts an end to tameness and sameness, and, still better, it may give fresh life to a thought-worn subject:-

> "And think that but unbinding of a pack
> To take one precious thing, thy soul, from hence";
> (D.II, p.130)

> "Heaven is as near and present to her face
> As colours are and objects in a room
> Where darkness was before, when tapers come";
> (2D. p.134)

> "(Honour) like tapers shut in antique urns
> Unless it let in air, forever shines and burns".
> (Cw.p.147)

> "Religion was
> Ray'd into thee like beams into a glass". (VI, p.37)

3. Originality:- The Metaphysical poet counts it a vice to say over what was ever said before. Both in the themes he chooses and in their treatment he cuts from whole cloth, - having a nervous dread of other people's ideas. He avoids The least semblance of a beaten path and makes of strangeness and novelty such prizes that he is ready to risk a fall in order to attain them, nothing A Metaphysical is more fearful of than to be found in debt for his part of his matter. It would look like a want of sufficiency, a sign of failing powers. Resaying an old thing well is only less pardonable than resaying an old thing ill; hence the surprising absence in them of those strains on which poetry usually depends and which, through long association, would seem to be part of its nature. They accomplish the feat of composing a body of poetry, much of it of a high excellence, without touching on those themes that are, as it were, laid down for poetic exercise. If they sing of love, it is to defy all common conventions on the subject; they seem to refuse to admit that they have like passions with other men. To admit and express them would be inconsistent with the principle of intellectual energy; it would be to please the inactive part of our minds at the expense of the active, to soothe and quiet the heart instead of exciting and interesting the intellect. And they carry their originality all the way through; to point of view and themes and treatment and figures and even into verse-forms;[6] they shun the set pattern; you will find no sonnets

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6. But shaped verses, which one sometimes hears of as Metaphysical peculiarity are not so at all. "They were a common device." Herbert has a streak of emblemist in him, and only he tries his his hand at them; they are too easy a test of ingenuity to be much of a temptation to the Metaphysical poet.

rime-royals, Spenserian stanzas or madrigals; their only concession, - and it is felt to be a lapse - is to the favourite form of the 17th century, the octosyllabic couplet, and Donne and Herbert avoid even that.

4. Vivacity of thought:- Upon thought as a finished product-something to be remembered and carried a way - the Metaphysical poet set very little store. We get from them few profound sayings or few expositions of great ideas, or if we get ~~strange~~ great ideas they are memorable from the strange turn given them, not from an equal greatness in their expression. But with ideas as such, with thought, the Metaphysical hardly concerns himself; his business is with thought in the making, with the act of thinking, with the powers and faculties that produce thought, not the thing produced. Thus: they do not show that they have subtle wits by giving out a subtle thought, but by the exercise of subtlety on any material they have before them; they do not show they have scope and range by the height and boldness of the idea left when he has finished the poem in the reader's ~~hand~~ mind ~~when he had finished the poem,~~ but by a series of extraordinary mental feats, of mental acrobatics, which they have performed during its progress, and which leave the slower-witted reader with mixed feelings of admiration and resentment. In a characteristic Metaphysical poem, one has before one, whatever its value for poetry, one of the most enchanting displays in the world, a skillful mind highly exercised. The exercise ~~It~~ often degenerates into a kind of game; here is a subject, what can you say of it? But even that is not ~~unpleasant~~ all to the bare. They like to set themselves prob-

lems at the beginning and to solve them beyond the reader's power of guessing, and from that solution to pass to another, inviting the reader to follow, but always outstripping him. Donne's Will is such a game of wits, yet by no means without poetic substance.

~~But these are~~ A plays: Upon serious themes they exercise ~~themselves~~ in still seriously. One of the few Metaphysical poems everybody knows opens with a challenge to wit:

> "Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
> Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so." (DI, p.162)

sets a proposition that calls for unravelment. The challenge is often still present, though more ~~veiled~~ obscurely, as in Crashaw's bold opening:-

> "Love, thou art absolute sole lord
> Of life and death", (p.130)

from which he proceeds to proofs not of bare facts but facts wittily interpreted:-

> "Thou are Love's victim and must die
> A death more mystical and high;
> Into Love's arms thou shalt let fall
> A still-surviving funeral", etc. (p.132)

In the same fashion Vaughan plays upon Isaac's marriage:-

> "Praying! and to be married! It was rare,
> But now 'tis monstrous", (VI, p.37)

beginning dramatically and ending with a conceit:-

> "First a young patriarch, then a married saint."
> (VI, p.39)

Cowley's Pindariques, the admiration of a century more intellectual than ours, offer brilliant dexterity as a fair substitute for the imaginative splendour of Pindar. Again it is the same spirit at work:

"O Life, thou Nothing's younger brother!
So like, that one might take one for the other!
What's Somebody, or Nobody?
In all the cobwebs of the schoolmen's trade,
We no such nice distinction woven see,
As 'tis To Be, or Not to Be.
Dream of a Shadow! etc." (Cw.p.202)

They take a delight in all kinds of difficulties, feigning them where there are none; they wrap a subject in obscurity in order to emerge with more éclat; they never rest, never let themselves flag for an instant, never give a loose rein to the easy or the obvious, but prick on their faculties to the full display of their high mettle.

This being the spirit largely responsible for conceits, critics are ready to put it down as an entirely reprehensible spirit. Poor conceits are reprehensible, but a spirit capable of good things ought not, in fairness ~~it seems to me,~~ to be judged only by the failures. Moreover, conceits of any kind, good or bad, are only one, and that not the most important, field of its operation. Their mode of thinking springs up naturally into conceits. ~~The~~ conceits catch the eye but they are no more detached in reality from the rest of their manner than foam is from water. Of the kind of conceits that flourish in the Metaphysical poets, it is easy to trace the origin in certain energetic mental processes; most Metaphysical conceits may be classed as (1) Hyperbole, (2) Paradox, (3) Curiosity. Broadly defined these same figures dominate the whole of Metaphysical style; most of what is striking in that issues from the heightened psychological processes that lie behind these extraordinary devices.

1. Hyperbole:- The figure is found most frequently in the three poets of the school who have strong wings to their genius. For a poet, there is a good deal of the patient pedestrian in Herbert, and Vaughan, a penetrating mystic, has his wings clogged by a too unquestioning admiration for Herbert, whose figures he does not seek to transcend. Yet there are one or two great passages in Vaughan where the thought rises to that height and independence of material circumstance, which shows a mind capable of long flights. But since in these places the hyperbole - if that is the right expression - is due rather to imaginative vision than to an extravagantly bold way of thinking, that is if it is a matter of content rather than of style, the discussion of it does not belong here. Vaughan betrays his boldness ~~of thought~~ less by set flights than by a chance line:-

"And clothe the morning star with dust"; (I, p.51)

or by a picturesque verb or adjective, -

"Whose light doth trample on my days". (I, p.182)

"These narrow skies". (V, p.200)

Herbert himself is not devoid of such high places:-

"To which the blast of death's incessant motion,
Fed with the exaltation of our crimes,
Drives all at last". (p.73)

As for Cowley, his flights, which are both high and frequent, give one a sense of strain; like so much of his purely Metaphysical poetry, they have the air of being a tour de force; such a phrase as "vulgar angels" (p.205) shows a conception pitched as high as Donne's or Crashaw's, but it falls from him

less naturally. Still, native or not, (and his most easeful poems, the Anacreontiques and the essay poems, would seem to say, not) the grand style, (the pseudo-grand style, I suppose, we ought in conscience to call it,) is made expert use of in a line that may have aided Milton:-

> "To the empyrean source all streams of light seemed to retire". (p.226) [7]

One may feel a strain in Donne also; but that is because he never tries to give the effect of ease. It would not come naturally to most poets, but it does to Donne to write,

> "She who was all this All, and could not fall
> To worse by company, for she was still
> More antidote than all the world was ill", (II,p.140)

or in the same ~~strain,~~ manner

> "What had his growth and generation done
> When what we are his putrefaction
> Sustains in us, earth, which griefs animate....
> Therefore we
> May safaier say we are dead than he". (II, p.75)

> "Thinner than burnt air flies this soul". (D II, p.157)

And Crashaw is as at home as Donne in these untrammeled flights. Perhaps, more at home; his genius has more of fire and less - too little - of earth in it than Donne's. Donne has few expressions of such unstrained scope as Crashaw's "lofty eyelids" (p.155), nor does he reach a ~~strain~~ piece like Crashaw's in his S.Teresa poems in which the higher the poet soars, the more familiar to him does

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7. And there are examples of extravagance in another view:

> "Thy beauty might
> Desires in dying confess't saints excite" (Cw.p.145)

> "Truth gives a dull propriety to my style
> And all the metaphors does spoil"- (p.132)

surrounding space seem to become. But I am trespassing on their contents.

Paradox:- By this I mean not the conflict of new with received opinion, but, without reference to the truth of the opinion, simply the clash of ideas or images. Where it had been the aim of the romantic school to promote concord by the association of like things, it is the aim of the Metaphysicals (by the opposite process) to shock and startle. Paradoxical associations furnished them with a sovereign antidote against the stock comparisons of romantic poetry. We find no more roses, lilies and purling brooks to describe sweetness and whiteness and softness; or if we do come upon them, as in Crashaw's angel-world we must, they are robbed of their tameness by a dash of wit:-

> "See, see, how soon His new-bloomed cheek
> 'Twixt mother's breasts is gone to bed.
> Sweet choice, said we! no way but so
> Not to lie cold, yet sleep in snow". (Cr. p.70)

But this almost courtly strain is confined to Crashaw and, even in him, the paradox is usually bedded deep in his substance, springing, just as in the others, from the energetic character of his thought:-

> "By the frugal negative light
> Of a most wise and well-abused night"; (Cr. p.81)

> "Angel-blinding light should shrink
> His blaze to shine in a poor shepherd's eye"; (Cr.p.14)

> "He whom the sun serves should faintly peep
> Through clouds of infant flesh: that He, the old
> Eternal Word, should be a child and weep;
> That He who made the fire should fear the cold", etc.
> (Cr.p.14)

In their most vivid and brilliant passages, where there is not a suggestion of conceit, not uncommonly the effect is entirely due

to a clash either in idea or in connotation. Phrases like Cowley's "Bright horror" and "voluntary destiny"; illustrate what I mean, so also those striking lines of Vaughan's:-

> "Who bent the spheres and circled in
> Corruption with this glorious ring"; (VI, p.57)

And

> "The youthful world's grey fathers in a knot"; (VI,p.200)

so also Donne's

> "Here lies a she-sun and a he-moon there". (I.p.86)

Though less obviously, Donne's habit of what I may call mixed diction, i.e., bringing words together from widely separate spheres of ideas, also illustrates this tendency: e.g.,

> "A bracelet of bright hair about the Bone". (I, p.66)

and his strangely powerful, "naked thinking heart". (I.p.64).

Curiosity:- Metaphysical thinking is curious. Whatever the poetic value of plainness, directness and simplicity in ideas, or in the expression of ideas, the Metaphysical poet must relinquish any claim to it; for if ever he is plain, direct and simple he ceases at that instant to be, in any characteristic sense, Metaphysical. Thought, if it is to be lively, must keep in motion; it must avoid the beaten track; it must give difficulty to the reader; and the Metaphysical poet finds all three requirements congenial to his spirit. I only quote simply to illustrate; the Metaphysical poets are generally curious. They search out indirection:-

> "Lord, thou art mine and I am thine,
> If mine I am, and thine much more
> Than I or might or can be mine;
> Yet to be thine doth me restore"; (H.p.196)

and oddity:-

> "Till thou did'st grow and get a wing,
> A wing with eyes and eyes that taste"; (VI, p.1284)

and again as in this compliment to the skill of a physician:-

> "As the great artist in his sphere of glass
> Saw the whole scene of heavenly motions pass,
> So thou know'st all so well that's done within,
> As if some living chrystal man thou'dst seen". (Cw.p.199)

and difficulty:-

> "When love with one another so
> Interanimates two souls,
> That abler soul, which thence doth flow,
> Defects of loneliness controls". (DI, p.54)

It would be possible still further to analyse ~~this side~~ of the Metaphysical genius, but I think not necessary. I have said enough, I hope, to convince the reader that all five of these poets agree together in carrying the classicist preference for a lively over a soothing style to excess; and that they carry it so far as to make intellectual energy a dominant principle; are ready to sacrifice such things as congruity, clarity, simplicity, etc., which to a classicist are of equal or superior importance. I hope also to have convinced him that they do so, not out of mere caprice; ~~that~~ they are much too good for that to be the explanation; but because the style suited itself admirably to the temper of their genius; or because, in the particular instance, they feel it to be the style that suits the kind of thing they have to say.

II. Realism

Sense of Reality. Like their intellectual energy, their realism is, as I have said, to an exaggeration of a classicist principle. It is founded on the secular, experimental view of things of which, in that age, every alert mind was bound to take account and be strongly influenced by. But though the metaphysicals were affected by the same influences as the classicists, they occupy an odd ~~position~~ attitude toward them. They carry the classicist scorn of romantic illusion, and the classicist frank acceptance of reality to an extreme undreamed of and undesired by the simple classicist realists; at the same time, the ground on which Dr. Johnson quarrelled with them, and justly, was precisely their lofty disregard of mundane and human interests. They behave with all possible arrogance toward such interests, taking every occasion to scoff at them; they are what Dr. Johnson calls them, metaphysical. Their position, however, is not logically anomalous, ~~on the contrary.~~ For who should give the world a close scrutiny and an honest acceptance unless a metaphysician? It is the romanticist and not ~~they~~ he who needs to temper its crudeness. For the interest of the romanticist is finally with the things of sense, even when, like Spenser, he relates them to divine ideas. But the metaphysician, having no stake in sensual reality, can afford to take it at its worst. At the same time, being so disdained by him, it can take no hold upon him; he flies loose with nothing to please but his own singular fancy; whereas, the classicist, for all he is anti-romantic, stakes so much upon this visible world that he can

not afford to flout and insult it; though he will not evade it ~~but~~ yet he will treat it with a certain respect. Bound neither way, the Metaphysical is more plain-spoken than the classicist and soars to greater heights than the romanticist. He follows up classicist realism with the ruthless hardihood of one who has nothing to lose; for him the material world may be as sordid and vicious as earthy men take it to be, and he leaves to romanticism the piety ~~of~~ whitewash. As a group perhaps I ought not to say they have no interest in the material world; when I say so the comparatively little part of Cowley's verse, which is, strictly speaking, religious, and not much more of Donne's, the rises up to remind me of the fact that while three members of the group are in practically all their work that counts exclusively religious poets, the best work of Donne and Cowley is not religious. It is true that Cowley's most ambitious poem is upon a Biblical subject; but his Mistress purports to be love poetry, and his Anacreontiques are untroubled by seriousness of any kind. And Donne wrote most of his poetry in his unconverted youth. So, if I were judging only by actual subject matter, I would be put to it to make out that the Metaphysical group was metaphysical in its interests. But I am not judging by subject matter, but by what ~~has more bearing~~ sheds light on their attitude of mind. And, except in the Anacreontiques and a poem here and there (Vaughan's earlier verse is out of the discussion altogether)[21] the point

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[21] He belongs there among the Sons of Ben ~~and Donne.~~

of view of the whole group is consistently metaphysical. They think in metaphysical terms. From the height from which they view it, the material world wears a poor enough appearance; their usual tone towards it is one of contempt; but when they condescend to, they describe it with a most bare exactitude, a perfection of observation which we are more apt to associate with science than with poetry. In his Progress of the Soul Donne seizes on the life of plants and animals with a sympathy so fierce as to be more than half revolting. There are differences between them—differences generally to Donne's credit—but there is a resemblance also between the "naturalism" of that piece and decadent French naturalism, of the sort we find in Baudelaire's description of a cat, or in Huysmann's description of orchids. Donne is not sickly, and he is more than half saved by his metaphysical desire to grasp the soul and essence of the thing described; nevertheless, to write thus a man must first divest himself of some of the decent prejudices of our human nature for he describes, not from his superior position as man, but as an animal among animals. The wolf, the elephant, the ape, the whale are reproduced in the full strength of their several characters, and so powerfully realized that the reader is drawn into their psychology, forgetting the world of men. The beasts are described from their own point of view, not as hitherto in relation to man's,- either as symbols of divine power, like the great beasts in Job or as object lessons, like the beasts in the bestiaries.[22]

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22 Herbert has a clerical poem he calls Providence: it is closer to the bestiaries where the interest is both in the beast and the moral; but it shows traces of the Progress. The "leaning elephant" is an attempt to reproduce Donne's realism.

His treatment of animals and plants is more striking because more strange, ~~but~~ and while it is no more naturalistic than his treatment of men and women in the Elegies and Satires; and here again Donne resembles no one so much as the late last century French. He shares that peculiar attitude of detached and ungenial sensuality, the scientific attitude toward vice, an attitude we think of as the last word in realism. Or rather, he affects to share it. He is as gross as Maupassant and as cold as Flaubert, but the spirit that drives him on is neither gross nor cold. If we imagine a Maupassant trained in the profoundly metaphysical philosophy of the middle ages, and deeply religious by nature; if we imagine Flaubert possessed by a passionate intellectual daring, we will get some idea of the realism of Donne. I repeat that it is the metaphysical and intellectual part of their genius which urges these poets on to their realistic excesses; it is a spirit that will not put up with compromise ~~and~~ which is at the bottom of the apparent contradictions and double-minded views which is the most baffling part of their poetry. In Donne the clash is most absolute. Of love, for example, no more celestial and no more sublunary notions are to be found than in his pages. He speaks of it in one set of poems with a brutal and contemptuous plainness, of the women who inspire it as shallow sensual fools; at one time as simple lust, and at another as a thing so high that scarcely angels can comprehend it. ~~One may say~~ that this difference is due to the divorce nature of his experience, ~~but that~~ not that Platonic will ~~not~~ account for it. For The poetical imagination of love arises in the mind of the lover, not in the sensible experi-

ence. If his own earlier acquaintance with love was sordid, why extend it to the marriage-loves of others in what are supposedly poems of its noblest exaltation, epithalamions? The only difference he makes is that while in his own case he brutalizes lust, in the case of his noble patrons he glorifies it, but equally without softening glorifying. No; the truth is that he and all the school look at every manifestation of sensual life with unsparing eyes; they come to experience determined never to take anything for what it is not, nor to confuse it with something better than itself. ~~I do not mean that they~~ This is not to write of sensual things with ascetic bitterness; but to they recognize that sensual objects are to be discriminated among, and are not all reprehensible; some, like nature, even carrying us on to the supersensual. And, when reprehensible, if also attractive, it would be only another kind of romanticism to represent them as not. ~~But~~ lust, however glorified, is still lust; not for a moment does Donne mislead his reader into taking it for a virtue. But the place to enlarge upon this will be when we come to examine the properties of the metaphysical spirit.

Just now I will leave the metaphysical side of it and pursue our enquiry into metaphysical realism by the light of the same quality in the classicists.

The classicists also were resolved to call things plainly by their own names and forsake romantic glamour. They had, however, other conditions to fulfil besides fidelity to the idea, whereas ~~but~~ apart from the vigorous and exact expression of the notion they desire to convey the Metaphysical is bound by nothing. Considerations of beauty or melody are with him decidedly secondary. Herbert is

almost a slave to a passion for exactitude; it is that and no desire to be "quaint" is what betrays him so often into unadulterated prose. He falls into literalism because he is so bound not to gild any material object. The "timber" and "coal" in the last stanza of his Virtue:—

> "Only a sweet and virtuous soul
> Like seasoned timber, never gives:
> But, though the whole world turn to coal,
> Then chiefly lives."
>
> (p.103)

which all lovers of the poem resent as a blemish in an otherwise almost perfect piece are, doubtless, what pleased Herbert best. For What could ~~better~~ have expressed his idea more faithfully? ~~Of~~ This realism comes out interestingly in his similes. Herbert's mind, of the English didactic type, is cast in a homely mould; it is the kind of mind to be struck continually by resemblances in mean or trivial things to his very abstract subject matter. But instead of seeking to ennoble them, as poets use, by subduing any element that might jar with the mood of the poem, he introduces ~~them~~ unpoetic objects in all their original crudity, with every particle of homely literal similes association still clinging to them, careful not to disturb it by any passion of his. And, further, he not only preserves the native, unpoetical state of the similes he discovers for himself, but goes the length of restoring to its first usage, to its original, pre-poetic condition a comparison which by long association had come to acquire a poetic connotation, sufficient, often, to reflect a charm back on the occupation from which it was drawn. Metaphors from trades like weaving and wine-pressing which other poets rely upon for atmosphere", Herbert completely restores to realism simply by the minutely technical turn which he gives them, ~~as for example,~~ . . . .

"Although thy heap be kept
For future times, the droppings of the stock
May oft break forth and never break the lock."
(p. 193)

so that in his pages they have no other air than that of hard and homely industries.

Occassionally Vaughan borrows such realistic touches from Herbert, but their use is perfunctory. The turn which he, particularly, gives to this realism is one which we are taught in this age to think very happy; Vaughan is our first accurate poet of nature. His eye is where Wordsworth said it should be,-on the object,- and for him also the object is a natural object. I do not know when the habit of studying nature scientifically for poetic purposes came in if not with Vaughan. He makes an interesting transition between. In the older poetry where the natural touches, no matter how exact, were there as illustration of the poet's mood, ~~in~~ the romantic poetry of the last century nature ~~is there~~ where they are in ~~its~~ their own right, ~~and~~ minuteness of observation ~~is~~ being looked upon as commendable in itself. Wordsworth is known now to have owed something to Vaughan; but one good quality of ~~his~~ Vaughan's he does not borrow,- Vaughan's entire want of this sort of pedantry. ~~Though he was a~~ Though he was a Physician and a naturalist Vaughan would not have introduced a detail of nature without a poetic object. Just as in the older poetry he brings in nature only by ways of illustration. That he achieves on this principle a realism like Wordsworth's or Blake's is simple due to the nature of his theme; due to the circumstance that he thinks and writes only of God. Other poets, writing of love in the spring draw into their verse the seasonable birds and flowers; nothing less charming will do to illustrate that delightful

mood. But, if one's theme is God, there is in nature no detail too simple or too obscure but one may find in it material for illustration.) The household life of birds in trees, the secure sleep of the all but invisible creatures, the play of light on leaves or water,- such things as these he notices not for their own sakes or because of themselves they are able to bring thoughts too deep for tears, but ~~in the same way~~ for the same reason the Provencal lover notices the white hawthorn flower, because ~~they fall in with his mood~~ of the relation of these things to his matter. His theme being universal, his observation is minute:-

"Oft have I seen.....
Some drowsy silk worm creep,
From that long sleep,
And in weak infant hummings chime, and knell
About her silent cell,
Until, at last, full with the vital ray
She wing'd away". (I,P.25)

~~But~~ He observes thus patiently, thus realistically, because of the bearing of all things upon the thought with which he is continually occupied:-

"And proud with life and sense,
Heaven's rich expense,
Esteemed - vain things - of two whole elements
As mean and span-extents.

Shall I then think such providence will be
Less friend to me?
Or that He can endure to be unjust
Who keeps His Covenant even with our dust?" (p.25)

This is the method of S. Francis de Sales who recommends us to watch the movements of doves as a refreshing subject of meditation. Nature is lovingly watched, not out of any Wordsworthian theory that it is a clearer manifestation of divinity than is to be found in the thought and passions of man, nor out of a Tennysonian theory that naturalistic details are poetic in their own right, but because nature inter-

prets and illustrates the emotions that arise independently of her; and as I say it is only because these emotions are so inclusive that we find in Vaughan the same closeness of detail and breadth of choice that we find in the later,-more than a century later,- naturalistic poets. His point of view may lead him to put things didactically; but how much deeper than didacticism he ~~is borne~~ goes appears in the felicity of his epithets:- "This windy world" (p.221),"purling corn" (p.270) "the cool moon" (p.204) etc. It takes him But the right word to use of Vaughan in his portayal of nature is "mysticism;" his realism is incidental to that.

Crashaw and Cowley do not describe directly enough to ever to be called realists; they present the object by a series of fancies woven around it; but then neither do they describe in conventional and "poetic" terms. Their far-fetched and fantastic comparisons do not belie or, in any sense, smooth over the reality of their subject; they are as free as the others of the crystal streams and golden wires of romantic poetry. In respect of this one must not be misled by Crashaw's silken and jewelled vocabulary. No one, not only in this intellectual group but, unless it be Swineburne, in the range of English poetry, is more capable of over-delicacy in diction, of overornamentation than Crashaw; he errs on the wrong side of sensuousness, even to enervation,-

"The rich and roseal spring of those rare sweets"
(p.145)

he is exquisitely musical, -

"Hark how the dear Immortal Dove
Sighs to his silver mate";
(p. 119)

"Nowhere but here did ever meet
Sweetness so sad, sadness so sweet";
(p.123)

in a way, with his silver and roses and flames and stars he ~~is~~ appears conventional. Nevertheless he is as guiltless as the rest of the weak and false tendencies in romantic verse. Speaking plain and to the point, ~~and~~ in no case does he subordinate his thought to the requirements of beauty. Had his thought been incompatible with, instead of dependent upon, the fairest language of which poetry is capable,- he is writing hymns upon the Nativity, or to the Virgin, or upon the mystical raptures of saints,- no doubt he would have sacrificed this luxuriance. As it was, though any one less warmly devotional can not help wishing some of the sweetness away, there is a masculine hardness of thought beneath this soft diction. Kindled and ~~For is~~ the diction itself is not all soft; ~~it is~~ not all in the strain of -

> "Amorous languishments, luminous trances;
> Sights which are not seen with eyes;
> Spiritual and soul - piercing glances,
> Whose pure and subtle lightning flies
> Home to the heart, and sets the house on fire
> And melts it down in sweet desire "
> (p.144)

(though if these "sweet and subtle pains" and "intolerable joys" are to be set down at all, if the mystic ardour is to be described in words, it must take over the language of earthly love.) Yet if the language is of sense, the thought is not. Kindled and on fire with divine love, a tender nature, transferred to the rich soil of the Catholic Church and there blooming himself out, Crashaw also rests no less upon a severely intellectual dogma, and however sensuous his language, his thought is not sensuous, and often neither thought not language. We have not many lines of a more high and masculine vigour than his "By thy large draughts of intellectual day". (p.140)

~~Yet~~ Still it must be admitted that, for a Metaphysical, he is too fond of the pleasures to be won from consonants and vowels. Frequently he allows

himself to be carried away by the mere intricate play of answering music -

"Complaining pipes and prattling strings"(p.62)

and, far from compressing thought, lets it float out to the thinness of simple sensation -

"Wake lute and harp and every sweet-lipped thing
That talks with tuneful string". (p.62)

But if he has lapses from the standard of a vigorous compression,- and in a concourse of praise" to the Name above every Name, the Name of Jesus" he could hardly be expected to abide strictly by it,- if his thought is sometimes thin, it sometimes also more than fulfils the requirements of the school. In this very hymn he breaks out into a passage of passionate strength:-

"O that it were as it was wont to be!
When Thy old friends of fire, all full of Thee,
Fought against frowns with smiles; gave glorious chase
To persecutions; and, against the face
of death and fiercest dangers, durst with brave
And sober pace march on to meet a grave.
On their bold breasts about the world they bore Thee
And to the teeth of Hell stood up to teach Thee;
In centre of their inmost souls they wore Thee"
(p.66)

in which not even the lavish allitteration can depress the native energy of thought.

But we must except Crashaw and Cowley from the class of realists in the sense in which the three others are realists, the modern sense. But if I may stretch the meaning of the word a little there is a sense in which they also belong. Properly speaking realism does not include an anti-romantic tendency; it ought to mean one would think, a determination to see things as they are, if that were possible, and that would include an anti-romantic tendency; but since

it is as illusory to see things blacker than they are as it is to see them gilded, on account of recent fiction we have come to use the word to signify a kind of pessimistic romanticism. This is the last sense in which it should be applied to the Metaphysicals. They set themselves to beat down romanticism at every point. On the side of illusion I have tried to show how Donne, Herbert and Vaughan combatted it; but there are other sides, and it is the opposition ~~of~~ romanticism on all its sides which I here would like to define as realism.

A better word, perhaps, if it were not so in need of explanation, would be "sense", By that I mean the solid half of "wit". Wit, of course, was the strong sword of the classicists, and a word which we have reduced only to ~~one aspect of~~ the less important side of its original meaning. As Ben Jonson used it ~~however~~, it signified a sound and lively intellectual faculty, something like ~~the~~ colloquial expression "brains". When Sir Thomas More spoke of a country as being well and "wittily" governed he meant it was governed by the opposite kind of men from fools. One hears the expression," a solid core of wit", The nearest word we have now for it is "sense", though sense has about it something too practical and low-flying, All in wit that is not comprehended in what I have called "intellectual energy", that is the quick and stirring part of it, the residuum of power, penetration, grasp, the clear and firm taking of things into account, and scorn of counterfeit,- all that composes the second side on which the classicists and Metaphysicals opposed the feminine idealism in romanticism, I should like to call that realism. Essentially it is the moving cause in realism and, I think,

justifies this redefinition.

Anti-sentimentality: Like the classicists all the Metaphysicals were determined to clear themselves of the least vestige of that soft effusiveness which could only lift its head in a prepared atmosphere. I cannot compose a satisfactory definition of sentimentality and not knowing where to lay my hands upon one, I must content myself with saying of it that the Metaphysicals seize every occasion to cry down and deride any mood that cannot stand the test of ridicule. Consequently they are especially hard, those of them who write love poetry, on the love-system of Petrarch and the whole chivalric convention. Donne, and Cowley after him, ~~as~~ never tired of railing against the pretense that love is something higher than sense:-

> "O! 'Tis imposture all...
> "That loving wretch that swears,
> 'Tis not the bodies marry, but the minds,..
> Would swear as justly, that he hears
> In that day's rude hoarse minstrelsy, the spheres.
> Hope not for mind in woman...";
> (D.I,p.41)

Donne in his true passion, and Cowley in his feigned one, have the air of very plain and masculine wooers; they wear that air throughout, though in love Donne is two men, in all instances but one a cynical young sensualist, and in that one a transcendent intellectualist; and though Cowley assumes as a bait for wit the old situation that he is on fire while her heart is all of unmelting ice, one phase of the Petrarchan convention, the assumption of it does not prevent him from flinging at every turn some jibe at that convention. Thus he addresses maidenhood as

> "Thou worst estate even of the sex that's worst"
> (p.129)

concluding,

"Say what thou wilt, Chastity is no more,
Thee, than a porter is his door",; (p.130)

and rails against beauty itself:-

"Beauty, thou wild fantastic ape,
Who dost in every country change thy shape!..
Thou flatterer, which compli'st with every sight!
Thou Babel which confound'st the eye
With unintelligible varity!
Who hast no certain what, nor where,
But vary'st still, and dost thyself declare
Inconstant as thy she-professors are."
(p.116)

against constancy, against honour, against women:-

"By customs and traditions they live,
And foolish ceremonies of antique date..

Before their mothers' gods they fondly fall,
Vain idol-gods that have no sense nor mind:
Honour's their Astaroth and Pride their Baal,
The thundering god of women-kind.
With twenty other devils more,
Which they, as we do them, adore."
(p.106)

Likewise Donne:-

" She knew treachery,
Rapine, deceit, and lust, and ills enow
To be a woman ";(d2,p.173)

"The mother (Eve) poisoned the well-head;
The daughters here corrupt us ".(11,p.153)

and again, seriously,-

"A naked thinking heart, that makes no show,
Is to a woman but a kind of Ghost."(I.,p.64)

They are not, however, mere vulgar cynics; their cynicism is the outcome of an excess of rough candour and bravado. This rough manly attitude they adopt, very adroitly, as a new compliment to love. This way the woman has no weak sentimentalist to subdue but a hardminded and resistent ~~male~~ realist whose conquest is all the more to her credit and love's. Under the guise of abusing and protesting against him, they strengthen the adver-

sary's hands: by magnifying the victim's powers of resistence, they enhance the glory of the victor, and offer her a more subtle flattery:-

> "The Devil take those foolish men,
> Who gave you first such powers;
> We stood on even grounds till then;
> If any odds, creation made it ours."
> (Cw.p.102)

> "O! were we wakened by this tyranny
> To ungod this child again, it could not be
> I should love her, who loves not me."

> "Rebel and atheist too, why murmur I?
> As though I felt the worst that love could do?"
> (DI.2 p.57)

When they do not mean to compliment, they give a substantial version of the manly heart of the Cavalier:"I came not,"says Donne, with "sighing odes" and "cross-armed elegies",-

> "I come not to call pity from your heart,
> Like some white-livered dotard, that would part
> Else from his slippery soul with a faint groan,
> And faithfully, without you smiled, were gone"
> I cannot feel the tempest of a frown;
> I may be raised by love, but not thrown down..
> Who first looked sad, griev'd, pin'd and show'd his pain,
> Was he that first taught women to disdain."
> (II.p.48-9)

At their most serious and impassioned moments,- or rather Donne at his, Cowley has none such,-this masculine refusal to accept the subservience incumbent on the Sidneian lover stands them in good service; seriously used it redoubles the force of their feeling by robbing it of the least suspicion of mere compliance with formal requirement, and enduring it (truly a wonderful improvement!) with reality :

> "Take heed of loving me;
> At least remember, I forbade it thee;
> Not that I shall repair my unthrifty waste

of breath and blood, upon thy sighs and tears,
by being to thee what then to me thou wast;
But so great joy ~~put~~ life at once outwears..
If thou love me, take heed of loving me";
(D.I:p.72)

Reality is death to sentimentality.

But if realism (is of service in love-poetry) ~~through~~ by removing the danger of falling into sentimental platitude, ( ) how much more service would it not render to religious poetry, where the danger, on account of the far greater rarity of true religious passion, is several times ~~greater~~ increased? A vigorous and manly tone, of itself, goes far toward scouting make-believe; of itself, though it is insufficient to lend reality to religion, and the absence of sentimentality from Metaphysical religious poetry may not be ascribed simply to that. Still, it does much; it takes away the closet air that hangs stifling about so much of that kind of composition, gives the effect of a plain approach. ~~Just~~ As in their love-poetry, just so in their religious the sense that the writer, instead of being in a trance or speaking to order, is in full and vigorous possession of his faculties increases our belief in the strength and reality of the religious passion. We have it to thank for such a stanza as this of Herbert's, - and for much else good in him:-

"I know the ways of pleasure, the sweet strains,
The lullings and the relishes of it;
The propositions of hot blood and brains;
What mirth and musick mean; what love and wit
Have done these twenty hundred years and more:
I know the projects of unbridled store:
My stuff is flesh, not brass; my senses live,
And grumble oft that they have more in me
Than he that curbs them, being but one to five:
Yet I love thee."(p.105)

and for this:-

"Man is a foolish thing, a foolish thing;..
"His house still burns and yet he still doth sing,
Man is but grasse:
He knows it; fill the glasse...

"Bid him but temper his excesse;
Not he: he knows where he can better be,
As he will swear,
Than to serve thee in fear..

"No man shall beat into his head
That thou within his curtains drawn canst see...

"He doth not like this virtue, no;
Give him his dirt to wallow in all night;
These preachers make
His head to shoot and ache...

"Thou pull'st the rug and will not rise,
No, not to purchase the whole pack of stars:
There let them shine,
Thou must go sleep or dine..

"A sick toss'd vessel, dashing on each thing;
Nay his own shelf:
My God, I mean myself." (p.120-123)

Vaughan, in this vein, has nothing to equal Herbert who excels in it; but though not the source of his finest work, it sustains and stiffens his thought on a lower level:-

"My forward flesh crept on, and subtly stole
Both growth and power; checking the health
And heat of Thine. That little gate
And narrow way, by which to Thee
The passage is, he termed a grate
And entrance to captivity;
Thy laws but nets, where some small birds,
-And those but seldom too- were caught;
Thy promises but empty words
Which none but children heard, or taught".
(1:p.116)

Crashaw has not this blunt, abrupt manner to safeguard him against sentimentality. Nevertheless I do not think he may be accused of being sentimental, not with any justice. His versification wants weight; and ~~that~~ his musical facility - taken with his florid diction and over-

soft, over-supple, Italianate style, like the trilled and rippling music of Rossini, does not prepossess one with his soundness. In Adde~~d~~ to this, his sentiments are of a warm~~th, an~~ abandon, which in English we are not used to, before or after the Reformation. Having the power to put in words ardours and ecstacies almost beyond the power of words to express, he yields to the impulse of his genius and is carried away by it. He impresses most readers as being brilliantly over-expresseive, partly also because not many understand what he is trying to express, Such flights as his transcend a the region of ~~coherent~~ ideas altogether, The nature of his subject excludes connected and reasoned discourse, to say nothing of the tough and knotty notions common to the other Metaphysicals. Hard thinking is in itself a strong defense against sentimentality, and it is one Crashaw has to forego. Still, granting everything, it is a mistake to call him sentimental; it is a mistake not to see that he is as firmly set against sentimentality, in his way, as the others in theirs. After all sentimentalism is a Teutonic rather than an Italian quality. It is due not so much to the absence of thought (unless through trying to substitute a feeling for a thought) as to some false note in the emotion itself, as, for example, pretending one's feeling is stronger than it is, or more noble. Real emotion is even a more certain preventive against sentimentality than real thought, and the emotion, however rare, however rapturously exalted, in Crashaw is genuinely felt. That is not to be doubted; the we may not follow him ~~but~~ we feel his own footing is sure; and while ~~though~~ he puts something of a strain upon our pure and severe taste, it is never through

a lapse in feeling; Crashaw's conceits, whatever their demerits, are seldom frigid. Moreover, though he passes continually into regions too rarified for thought, the thinking faculty is not extinct, and his feeling is founded on thought. As far as thought alone can carry him he gives it way, he mounts up on all his faculties, leaving the sober ones only as he is compelled to; and the height, vigour and life in Crashaw's fine passages, when he either works himself free of conceits or absorbs them in the passion of his utterance, is as killing to sentimentality as anything in Herbert or Vaughan. When he has a mind to, he can speak in a hardy strain like theirs:-

> "Make to thy reason, man, and mock thy doubts;
> Look how below thy fears their causes are;
> Thou art a soldier, Herod, send thy scouts,
> See how he's furnished for so feared a war.
> What armour does He wear? a few thin clouts.
> His trumpets? tender cries. His men, to dare
> So much? rude shepherds. What his steeds? Alas!
> Poor beasts! a slow ox and a simple ass."
> (p.28)

But does he less effectually rout sentimentality in such lines as these?-

> "O sweet incendiary! show here thy art,
> Upon this carcass of a hard, cold heart;
> Let all thy scattered shafts of light that play
> Among the leaves of thy large books of day,
> Combined against this breast at once break in
> And take away from me myself and sin..
> O thou undaunted daughters of desires!
> But all thy dower of lights and fires;
> By all the eagle in thee, all the dove;
> By all thy lives and deaths of love;
> By thy large draughts of intellectual day,
> And by thy thirsts of love more large than they;
> By all thy brim-filled bowls of fierce desire...
> By all the heav'ns thou hast in Him..
> Let me so read thy life that I
> Unto all life of mine may die."
> (p.140)

Still, it is his genuine strength of soul rather than aggressive intellectual power which preserves Crashaw from romantic sentimentality. He has a lively wit and almost excessive mental agility, but no of the solid and sensible kind which instantly clears the air of sighs and vaporing. He is not in this the equal of the others, but, considering his nature and his themes, it is extraordinary how like then he is. Take this, for example:-

> "Why, man, this speaks pure mortal frame;
> And mocks with female frost Love's manly flame,
> One would suspect thou meant'st to paint
> Some weak inferior woman-saint"
> (p. 138)

It is the Metaphysical poet who speaks.

Empiricism: The contrast between their content and their manner is generally striking and sometimes glaring; theirs is a combination that won't combine not at any rate with smoothness, but results commonly in clashes and sparks. But as long as the inconsistency is simply between manner and substance the effect is rather exhilirating; we feel the effect without being clear about the causes;it is not until they pass over into the sphere of ideas which corresponds to their manner that we begin to see how actual, and incompatible, the opposition between the two. ~~things are~~ is. The philosophy of the classicists is empirical, theirs Aristotelian metaphysical; but in their settled determination to put down romanticism and all its works they thrust at its philosophy, which is far more like their own, than theirs is like empiricism. In sensible things the Metaphysicals prefer what is modern, actual and open to investigation; they reserve their faith for the things of

faith, where as it was the romanticist custom to apply it to the things of sense. The Metaphysicals want two clear worlds; the Romanticist one hazy one, what enables them to unite both worlds is a kind of sentimental Platonism. It is on this head - the pathos of Platonism, its tendency to ennoble common things by deriving them, not too scientifically, from divine origins - that nettled the Metaphysical, Cowley and Donne take the Platonic "Ideas" which had been sentimentalized - beauty and love particularly - and demolish them. Vaughan, who is milder-mannered, says with precision,-

> "Beauty consists in colours, and that's best
> Which is not fix'd but Flies and flows";
> (1.p.138)

and Herbert, though he has a just admiration for Plato and has one line at least that "Spenser platonizing might have written-

("Spring from that beauty which can never fade") (p.58)

makes a point of dispelling the Platonic pathos. Platonism had been made the defense of the aristocratic principle; but Herbert is much too practical and literal to swallow any such theory:-

> " The fumes that spring
> From private bodies make as big a thunder
> As those which rise from a huge king" (p.78)

Apart from this definite opposition, the Metaphysical poet felt he had a right to adopt the language and sentiments of the new philosophy; if they were irreconciliable with his fundamental beliefs he did not know it, or if he knew it, he brazened it out. Donne can write:-

> "There's nothing either good or ill alone;
> Of every quality Comparison
> The only measure is, and judge, Opinion"
> (II. P. 174)

If one reads Cowley by the light of later developments, he will appear a preparer and introducer of specious 18th century ideas, and, very likely, he did his part in bringing on that irreligious and unpoetic period. He was a keen enough botanist to have himself made a member of the new Royal Society; of the two camps into which secular philosophy was in his time divided, he belonged decidedly to the Pyrrhonists, writing a witty Ode against the Dogmatists. In my edition this is followed in the edition I have by another on the use of reason in divine matters, highly sanctioning it:-

> "In vain, alas, these outward hopes are tried;
> Reason within's our only guide", (p.47)

And for "Mr. Hobs", not a metaphysical (mystical) philosopher, he expresses admiration of this warmth (scholastic);-

> "I never yet the Living Soul [of Philosophy] could see,
> But in thy Books and Thee.
> 'Tis only God can know
> Whether the fair Idea thou dost show
> Agree entirely with his own or no.
> This I dare boldly tell,
> 'Tis so like Truth 'twill serve our turn as well"
> (p.188)

Judging by such formal expression of opinion we would not take Cowley for a metaphysical poet. But we must be careful not to read these 17th century people backward as if they knew, and could be made responsible for, the results of their novel and interesting opinions. They found no difficulty in holding at once both an ancient system and the ideas destined to dissolve, or at least to bring discredit upon, that system, indeed I doubt whether it could have occurred to them that that system might be dissolved; for to them it must have had the solidity of truth itself. How-

ever that may be, these Metaphysical poets felt at liberty to take up a sceptical and scoffing attitude toward all that pertains to the material world, leaving the jurisdiction of that world at least, entirely to the eye and the brain. And, as in every other matter, they are intemperate in their scorn of views ~~that~~ which do not take the facts, in their unbeautified condition, into full account. Who but an empiricist-metaphysical could have thus described creation -

> "All things were one nothing, dull and weak,
> Until this raw, disordered heap did break,
> And several desires led parts away "? (D.II.p.49)

If the other three are less definite in the expression of empiricist views, it is probably because their subject matter gave them little opportunity. In what pertains to the visible world they have the <u>sentiment</u> of empiricism.

Moreover, in what pertains to religion itself, while they accept revelation as the property of faith and not of reason, or not finally of reason, they take up the attitude of practical experimentalists, writing, each one, not as the type soul (the attitude of the authors of the medieval Latin Hymns, one speaking for all,-

> "Eia Mater, fons amoris,
> Me sentire vim doloris
> Fac, ut tecum lugeam")

but in his own person, in his own circumstances, with his own peculiar temptations. They stick close to the facts of their own spiritual struggle and do not generalize them. Herbert's poems are a record like a diary; ~~it is~~ continually note the autobigrahical note ~~he continually strikes:-~~

> "Whereas my birth and spirit rather took
> The way that takes the town;

Thou didst betray me to a lingring book,
And wrap me in a gown...

"Yet, for I threatened oft the seige to raise,
Not simpring all mine age,
Thou often didst with academick praise
Melt and dissolve my rage" (p.48)

and, though the others are less specific than this, they only report the religious experience as it came to them. Whether it be a fault or no, their verse is so far from the anonymity of the medieval hymns that almost every line of it bears the peculiar stamp of the author's temperament. If one stumbled on an isolated verse of Donne's, or of Crashaw's or of any of the others', though its burden were such as any religious heart might share, one would know it for whose it was. That this should be so furnishes an unmistakable sign of their religious empiricism.

CHAPTER III

Content: Metaphysical Elements

Most of what I have been saying so far relates rather to their style,- style taken in the large sense of manner and gesture,- than to their actual content. The two things can never be absolutely separated; style by itself, if it is characteristic, gives the clue to content; it fashions content to its own mould, and, in treating one, especially in such a study as this, the other must be kept constantly in mind. Yet between the style and content of these Metaphysical poets there is a greater discrepancy than is common. I do not know that there is any logical reason why one should not write upon grave subjects in the manner they adopted, byt, probably through long association, we feel they do a violence in joining this over-energetic style to religious or philosophic themes. There should be something more subduing in the religious mood.

In reading the Metaphysical poets that is one's first impression, - the incongruity of their style their thought, that it is a violent union. But as one reads more deeply the impression is modified and one comes to perceive that the union is less capricious and fortuitous than one thought and perhaps after all they knew what they were about. A principle begins to discover itself. Although by their content they are as far removed from the ordinary classicist as by their manner from the ordinary romanticist they took hold of that content in such a way as to relate it to that manner, and the connexion, whether

or not dictated by a high poetical tact, is at least genuine. Behind both, guiding both, is their intellectual temper.

The classicist manner we usually associate with a not too serious subject matter, either the frivolous worldliness of the Cavaliers or the graver worldliness of the political writers. Their contemporaries who had to express higher and more universal themes seemed to find the most natural and fitting style for these some modification of Spenser's. It is the Metaphysical peculiarity to unite their version of the one with their version of the other.

The body of Metaphysical work is religious in substance, the Metaphysical vein at its most characteristic ~~is~~ being religious; and though they have also much good work, perhaps, poem against poem, their best, which may not be called religious, yet the treatment is so prevailingly intellectual, and the interest, as seen in allusion, turn of thought and such things, is so prevailingly theological that, [even remembering that, excepting his epic, Cowley has little or not set religious verse, and that the bulk of Donne is in satire, epistle, elegy and the like,] it is still not misleading to say that to most intents and purposes the Metaphysicals are religious, and this holds [illegible] or if we now attach too much emotion to that term, are theological poets. Cowley may seem to strive after it, but at his lightest no Metaphysical poet ever attained the careless charm of the Cavaliers; they are too weighted with intellect.

Something, however, more specifically their own than weight and seriousness of substance distinguishes the school not

only from the classicists but also from the religious romanticists, who were substantial enough. Scarcely a 17th century poet who has not some and generally much religious verse; Drummond and Herrick each devote a book or so to it, ~~and~~ There is however a little band still more exclusively religious than our group, among them Crashaw's friend, Sir Joseph Beaumont, whose Pysche is a religious epic too long for human reading. Not alone by seriousness of content is our group to be distinguished from their contemporaries, nor even by such a content arrayed in an exaggeration of the current classicist manner. Their content, like their manner, is their peculiarly, though also, like their manner, it is founded upon principles already in existence ~~and~~ of which it is the version only ~~which~~ that is peculiar to them.

In England in the 17th century Christianity, outside of controversial Puritanism, was still Catholic and intellectual. The principle of private judgment had not yet dissipated its pretensions to universality. Not only was it not supposed to vary from Christian to Christian, but to be founded on philosophic principles true for all humanity, true whether known or not. It was founded on a metaphysic slowly built up during the course of centuries, and so woven into the texture of thought as to lose the aspect of a philosophic system. We now see it as the schoolmen's elaboration of Greek metaphysics, but it has taken almost three centuries of an antagonistic type of thought to withdraw us sufficiently to see it so, and in the early seventeenth century it still held a place like that of logic, as a systemization of unalterable intellectual laws. Just as we assume as a basis

of our ideas certain physical laws like gravitation or the conservation of energy, they then assumed and built upon certain metaphysical relations, those between type and phenomena, eternity and time, sense and spirit, and the more serious a man was, and morally the more profound, the deeper were such distinctions impressed upon his mind. Together with this metaphysic went a subtly discriminated ethic derived from centuries of Christian moral experience, the two interwoven in sentiment and by logical implication.

Medieval orthodoxy:

As I say, practically all poetic religious thought all that was not actively partizan and bitter, rested on ~~its distinctions~~ this XTn metaphysic, from before Dante to after Milton. It is only to be expected then that our group, as High Church Angelicans and Catholics[1] would have had its speculative thought moulded in these categories. What is more surprising is, that while the 17th is the last metaphysical century, and already new types of thought were arising that were beginning to obscure the older types, the poets of our group, who were in ordinary matters ~~of thought~~ were modern among the moderns, should have clung so much more tenaciously than their philosophic-religious contemporaries to what, after all, was a piece of medievalism. For ~~that~~ the old distinctions ~~should have been so much~~ were far more firmly imbedded, ~~so~~ much more vividly present, the reference to them ~~so much~~ more constant in the ~~them~~ than in any other writers of the period. Perhaps it so is because their ~~thought is more firm~~

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1. Crashaw was a convert from the Anglican Church to the Roman Catholic; Donne the other way. Some doctrinal distinctions existed, but the categories of thought were the same for the whole group.

and vivid than other poetic thought, especially more firm and vivid than romantic thought, that this phase of it makes so much stronger an impression. Whatever the reason ~~one of the most striking things about~~ Metaphysical verse is ~~the way its thought falls constantly into the strain of~~ medieval Christianity, and for its energetic enunciation of that strain. It is the ethical note that Herbert sounds most frequently:-

> "What is this weary world, this meat and drink,
> That chains us by the teeth so fast?"
> (p. 130)

Donne the speculative:-

> "But, pause, my soul, and study ere thou fall
> On accidental joys, the essential";
> (II, p. 140)

Vaughan the meditative:-

> " But when time's restless wave
> Their substance doth deprave,
> And the more noble essence finds his house
> Sickly and loose," etc.
> (I, p. 26)

Crashaw the imaginative:-

> "Home to the original source of light and intellectual day". (p. 153)

Cowley, also, harks back to it, though seldom more than half seriously, and generally for the sake of some play:

> "With a frail good they wisely buy
> The solid purchase of eternity"

But, besides this stronger and more frequent reference, there is still a further and more important particular which, in their acceptance of the old metaphysic, marks off our group from the Fletchers and Quarleses. It is this: Already in the 17th cen-

tury two accents had come to be put upon it, - a sentimental and an intellectual. Its ancient integrity ~~broken~~ tempered with, so much of it as was bound up with what I may call the pathetic dogmas of Christianity, - what Protestants now speak of as Evangelical Christianity, - was taken over by those poets who made their main appeal to the emotions. (~~I do~~ The appeal was not ~~mean~~ necessarily to the religious emotions) and the clear outlines of its thought more or less lost sight of in a blur of feeling. The dogma of the Redemption, for example, may be presented by such writers in what are actually metaphysical terms, but all a Christian (~~and~~ noone else will take anything may be) will take away ~~from reading them~~ is an emotion. Such thoughts ~~have~~ changed to feelings.

In spite of the highly successful appeal which they make ~~Metaphysicals~~, certain of them, at least, at certain moments, ~~make~~ to the emotions, but they would be the last persons to emotionalize a piece of clear thinking. Their emotional successes on the whole are rare, because incidental, ~~because~~ their primary appeal ~~to being~~ here and always intellectual. They aim, Herbert, Crashaw, Cleveland, ~~himself~~ ~~aims~~, full as ~~they are~~ ~~is~~ of religious pathos ~~- aims~~, to engage and interest their auditors, first and foremost, as they are intellectual and rational beings. Their own apprehension of things is first of all intellectual. On the side of diction, versification, figures, I have already tried to show that ~~it~~ this is so; and, as upon this, the formal side, they exaggerate the intellectual elements, so do they also, upon the side of content, exaggerate the intellectual elements.

~~It is time to~~ I had better here say ~~that~~ by Metaphysical content I do not mean what is usually meant by that word, their actual subject

matter. To a Metaphysical his theme was not a ~~subject~~ matter of long and careful consideration; as ~~with a clever essayist~~ the formal subject is to ~~the Metaphysical poet~~ him what it is to a clever essayist ~~no more than~~ a peg on which to hang comment. They neither describe nor narrate nor for a moment lose themselves, as we say, in their subject; nor for an instant does the writer, as commentator, drop out of view; his sole interest is to display not his subject in and for itself but such intellectual fire as it is capable of evoking. To be thus evocative almost any theme will do. The common emotions which make the stock and store of poetry are either entirely absent from Metaphysical verse or intellectualized into something new and uncommon; if it indicative that we simply do not find any of the primary human passions in their unsophisticated form, not warm and simple love, not grief, not longing, not careless joy, not affection for home, child or country. And with the common emotions, the common forms of verse are absent; they avoid the beaten path. One wonders how lyric poets can write without songs or sonnets, elegies (Donne's are not really that) pastorals or any other old and stimulating forms; how they can write without classical allusions, or faery or magic, or, for that matter, without the vocabulary, refrains and cadenced repetitions that descend to every poet as part of his outfit. They strip themselves and stand on their own bare wits; they are able to do without assistance. Their interests are all transcendental and their method to keep their own and their reader's intelligence awake and alert by an unflagging energy of thought and fancy. So, when one speaks of their content, all that one can mean is

the stuff out of which they habitually manufactured their thought, their way of thinking, their ultimate point of view. Point of view, on account of their peculiar method, so determines content that we may treat them as equivalent.

It would be incorrect to say that the content of Metaphysical poetry was metaphysics, or in any way imply that they are metaphysical in the sense in which that expression is sometimes applied to the poetry of Wordsworth and Browning. Their aim is not prove a theory, or exhibit a system, or poetical axes to grind of any kind; they are not metaphysical in the sense that Spenser's hymns are, that is by taking some leading metaphysical idea and elaborating it. Often enough it is true we find in them ideas; and lines, not infrequent in them all, like these of Cowley's-

> "We look not upon Virtue in her height,
> On her supreme Idea, brave and bright,
> In the Original Light:
> But as her Beams reflected pass
> Through our own Nature or ill Custom's Glass"-
> (p. 195)

might tempt us, to apply to them the title on the score of content. But set Metaphysical ideas are present in these writers only by way of illustration: we do not call a moralist a naturalist, because he bids us consider the ant. Full to overflowing as they are of metaphysical thought, the form in which it takes shape is only incidentally that of direct exposition.

Their metaphysical quality is something more fundamental. Their content is anything, the moulds into which that content is poured and which it takes its shape, that is the metaphysical part. The terms of metaphysical thought are the terms

when it goes into the gold purity

of their thought; medieval Metaphysic directs their interest, influences their imagination and colours their whole apprehension of existence. ~~So to speak,~~ their psychology is metaphysical.

So deeply imbrued is the texture of their minds with this Metaphysical dye, that we find Metaphysical similes and turns of thought, not only where there is some correspondence in the matter, (when they are engaged upon serious subjects), but also in the most unlikely, the most incongruous places. - ~~everywhere~~. Not only in Herbert and Vaughan and Crashaw, but in Cowley also and Donne. Indeed Donne is ~~more~~ apt to introduce a piece of Metaphysical writing ~~in a place~~ where you would not look for it ~~where to find it~~ produces an odd sense of surprise - ~~than~~ where his matter gives him ~~a~~ warrant. Cowley at his lightest, Donne at his worldliest, stranger yet, at his most sensual, find the readiest material for comparison in the metaphysic of religion. I have ~~not~~ counted them, but at a rough guess I should say a full half of the metaphors in Cowley's Mistress are drawn from that source. Such a stanza as the following is but one example of a common practice:-

> "Compared with her all things so worthless prove;
> That nought on earth can toward her move,
> Till't be exalted by her Love.
> Equal to her, alas, there's none;
> She like a deity is grown;
> That must Create, or else must be alone."
> (p. 98)

To illustrate his mistress's inconstancy - "On leaving Me, and then loving Many" - he writes:-

> "So Men, who once have cast the Truth away,
> Forsook by God, do strange, wild lusts obey;
> So the vain Gentiles when they left t'adore
> One Deity, could not stop at thousands more."
> (p. 78)

Donne, having lost a gold chain of his Mistress's and bitterly complaining of the reparation he must make, refuses to be comforted by the suggestion that

> " the gold doth still remain
> Though it be changed and put into a chain.
> So in the first fallen angels resteth still
> Wisdom and knowledge, but 'tis turned to ill"
> (I, p. 123)

a comparison for which he had to turn a good deal out of his way. Again the twentieth elegy, where sense is given its full freedom, plays continually upon angels, souls and revelation; women use jewels, he says, only to put off fools, like the gay covers of sacred books "for layman",

> "Themselves are only mystic books,which we
> - Whom their imputed grace will dignify-
> Must see revealed."
> (I, p. 149)

He carries the same way of thinking with him in all moods, in jest, in light love, in argument, in satire. In the most serious and transcendental love poem he wrote he has a turn analogous to one I have just quoted from one of his most simply carnal. It is next to the last stanza of the Ecstasy:-

> "To our bodies turn we then, that so
> Weak men on love reveal'd may look;
> Love's mysteries in souls do grow,
> But yet the body is his book"
> (I, p. 56)

A profounder influence yet I have noted earlier, the moral influence. By this I am not referring to the state of mind shown in the request Cowley left that anything in his book incompatible with religion and good manners should be expugned; that is like Addison and the 18th century; there is nothing metaphysical about

it. The influence I am thinking of shows its presence, as I pointed out in reference to his realism, as much in Donne's sensual and satiric verse as in Herbert's didactic, - it is the clear exactitude, the ~~utter absence of~~ confusion, ~~in~~ their moral distinctions. Donne when he is sensual knows he is; he is frankly and cynically animal, and no physiological passion, however, he may rejoice in it, can draw him to think its nature other than it is; ~~this is a great comfort.~~

Upon perfectly clear, fixed, and solid principles, intellectual and moral, the body of Metaphysical thought (is founded.) And it has more virtues yet. Medieval Metaphysic was of a height and range of which we, who have extended the physical range but narrowed the spiritual, can have small conception. It included heaven and hell, time and eternity; it looked out with clear eyes upon the field of pure thought and then (by faith) upon still farther regions; it speculated intensely upon the nature of beings and acts the very existence of which is shadowy to us or dark altogether; it ventured to gaze - medieval moralists are instant in their warnings against the pitfalls for pride such venturing engendered - by sheer power of intellect upon God immediately. Such a system fell by inheritance to any 17th century thinker who had faith sufficient or philosophy sufficient to receive it. Our group have enough of both, not, perhaps, to compass the whole, but, at least, to apprehend its greater outlines and divisions. They seem to view life as the filii Dei in the Imitation view it, "qui stant super praesentia et speculantur

aeterna; qui transitoria sinistri intuentur oculo, et dextro coelestia."[2]

This high liberty of mind they attained ~~to~~ not by the slow and painful methods pointed out in the Imitation, for, though good and devout, and some of them more than that, they were scarcely saints of that magnitude to understand the divine plan by ~~faith~~ only. Nor is it of their spiritual insight that I am here speaking. That supplemented and, no doubt, gave a certain force of sincerity to the other, but their metaphysic is independent of spiritual experience; it is an intellectual assumption. They assume it to be true, not on the authority of great names, or because it had the Church's sanction and they had acquiescent minds; they assume it because, having keen and sceptical minds, they require that their reason be given its fullest play; and having religious minds, that their intellectual principles should have depth and permanence. The group consists of men of learning and academic accomplishment whose wits had been severely exercised by the theological disputes of their time, which, however disconcerting for religion, furnish the best kind of instrument for strengthening the intellectual faculties.

These disputes had had their effect, and religious Englishmen of the 17th century were no longer able to take over scholastic metaphysic with that balance of faith with reason which marked its ideal. Our poets, like the rest ~~of them~~ were obliged to place their accent on one or the other, and their temper of mind inclined them to place it strongly on the side of reason. The effect of this over-accenting of the intellectual

2. Liber III caput XXXVIII.

elements in scholasticism makes itself felt in various ways throughout the whole of Metaphysical poetry; and since it furnishes the most characteristic and interesting aspects of its content, I shall devote the rest of this essay to their examination.

To begin with the most obvious, it would, of course, be the cause of their fondness for merely playing with a notion or a fancy sophistically, that is, verbally, without regard to its real significance. That is the vice, extremely attractive to people who deal with ideas without taking any responsibility for them, into which scholasticism degenerated. They liked to start an idea, and, under the pretense of solving it, make new difficulties in their turn in need of solution. Donne is past master at this game, and Cowley a close second. It is their delight to turn a proposition over and over, and continue to find fresh things to say of it where you would have thought it to be exhausted by the first instance; or, a variation on this, to keep to one strain but to pile up, with inexhaustible invention, a dozen views of it. "M. Crashaw's Answer for Hope is a good instance of a favourite method. Crashaw carries it on through five stanzas, but for illustration the first will be enough:-

> " Dear Hope! Earth's dowry, and Heaven's debt!
> The entity of those that are not yet.
> Subtlest, but surest being! thou by whom
> Our nothing has a definition!
> Substantial shade! whose sweet allay
> Blends both the noons of Night and Day:
> Fates cannot find out a capacity
> Of hurting thee.
> From thee their lean dilemma, with blunt horn,
> Shrinks as the sick moon from the wholesome morn"
> (p. 159)

This is the kind of cleverness that brought the schoolmen into disrepute; (and the Metaphysical poets also); people resent more cleverness than the case calls for; it is an abuse of wit. Crashaw here follows the scholastic method of definition, which consists in turning a subject over and over upon certain categories of thought and striking out a great variety of new and unlooked for aspects, It is all part of the scholastic (or in this and like instances I had better say the kind of thing into which scholasticism degenerated) love of exercising their highly trained argumentative faculties. To give these their freedom was in itself pleasure sufficient; to refine, to double on oneself, to take daring flights, to show their points, this was their main object; their ostensible object was secondary, any trifle would do for that. The Metaphysicals also make a game of thinking; they pursue an idea not with any hope of coming at just conclusions, of saying the right and indisputable thing, (unfortunately that is likely to be also the obvious and common thing, and commonplace was a worse vice in Metaphysical eyes than outlandishness) but for the excitement of the pursuit. During this pursuit they may fall into fantasy and curiosity, but neither is that their object; fantasy, curiosity, extravagance, and the rest are simply by products comparatively unimportant in themselves and only valuable as showing the activity of the minds which strike them off. Scholastic jugglery and the Metaphysical ideal of wit here fall together; both have their influence.

In this same connexion of juggling with ideas the Meta-

physical fondness for the technical jargon of the School ought to be noted. This fondness is a thing distinct from their deeper, and half unconscious, adherence to the great categories of Metaphysical thought, which do not consist in counters. Terms like, entity, quiddity, actives, passives, etc., are very useful when one is banding a notion about without respect to what it actually represents. But they can be dispensed with even so if other technical terms are forced to do service in the same office. Thus Cowley, who has a special predilection for medicine (like Vaughan he was a physician) will find a starting point for wit by assuming that the wound he has taken from love is physical:

> "Cordials of Pity give me now,
> For I too weak for Purgings grow.
>
> "Do but a while with patience stay;
> For Counsel yet will do no good,
> 'Tis Time, and Rest and Heav'n allay
> The violent burnings of my blood",
> (pp. 94-95)

But though other matter will do, the actual game of tossing an object of thought about, having first abstracted it from its sensible effects and relations, is none the less scholastic; and the most familiar and natural language is drawn from the old terms, even then losing currency and now obselete, which had been the counters of the School. The stanza from Crashaw's Hope is a good illustration, and here is a yet more typical one from Cowley:-

> " His Father in Law an higher place does claim
> In the Seraphique Entity of Fame.
> He since that Toy his Death,
> Does fill all Mouths and breathes in all men's Breath,
> 'Tis true, the two Immortal Syllables reamin,
> But, Oh ye learned men, explain,
> What Essense, what Existence, this,
> What Substance, what Subsistence, what Hypostasis
> In six poor Letters is?" (p.202)

[illegible]

For a certain order of ideas there is no other language; having such an idea to express what else was there for Crashaw to say than what he does say,-

> "As lumps of sugar lose themselves and twine
> Their subtle essence with the soul of wine"?
> (p. 160)

While philosophy was composing new catchwords, these poets found ~~in~~ the old ones the best ~~conveyances~~ not of ideas but, as the Schoolmen had, of rapid, flexible, intricate, and, probably I had better add, futile thinking.

The use of these terms no doubt encouraged the Metaphysical poets in their tendency to obscurity in expression. They are almost universally difficult. Often the reader is obliged to retranslate a word back into what it represents in nature before he can reduce their ideas to a comprehensible state; and, occasionally they will not reduce, possessing no natural, but only a logical existence. Technical terminology is not always to blame; the quality, of Metaphysical thought is complex; it is rapid without being fluent, and so eliptical, so out of the common, so beset with obstacles, that its expression is almost necessarily choked and involute, and it is but seldom that it runs perfectly clear and limpid. For instances I need not go to Donne; Crashaw, the clearest of them all, is sufficient. Take these lines (they form part of an elaborate play upon the idea that on the last day the sun shall be darkened):-

> "By the oblique ambush of this close night,
> The right-eyed Areopagite
> Shall with a vigorous guess invade
> And catch Thy quick reflex; and sharply see
> On this dark ground to descant of Thee"
> (p. 81)

Hard, harsh, and obscure, but full of vigour and intellectual substance; curious but never insipid; highly abstract;- for thinking of that character what nearer parallel than the disputations of the Schoolmen?

So far the parallel holds most closely in the matter of mental procedure. Their processes resemble one another in being both brilliantly sophistic and out of the plain and natural course which thought is expected to follow. But this procedure rests upon, or at least has an affinity with, certain attitudes of mind. The Metaphysical poets would not have pushed the merely intellectual quality of their style so far unless they had over-estimated the merely intellectual faculties in general. It would seem a task to outdo the scholastics on the point of intellectuality, and perhaps I use the wrong word, at any rate I do not use it in its best sense. I do not mean by it that high governing faculty which allots to every part its due proportion, to faith hers, to reason hers, to experience hers; I mean to identify intellect with the speculative portion of us, the arrogant, inquisitive, insubordinate part, impatient of mystery and making truceless war upon the irrational and the unreal; dangerous if unregulated, fatal if suppressed. But when I say that the Metaphysicals over-estimated and exaggerated the inclination, always present in the scholastics, toward aggressive intellectuality, I still need to explain that they do not do so upon a theory; that after all they are poets, philosophic but not systematic. The spirit of ungenerous scepticism is as out of place in poetry as it is in religion; as far as it signifies a cold timidity and

niggardly prudence (though to do it justice medieval scepticism scarcely signified that) they were utterly free of it. They were lured on by another spirit. Genius to them meant to have all one's faculties raised to a higher power, especially to have a more vigorous intelligence than common. Now to take high ground upon all intellectual questions would be simply a sign of genius; to pull back, to assume insufficiency, to veil the eyes, would only augar that one's wits were of common make; hence the great part, their bold intellectualism, which is with them much more a matter of gesture and manner than of substantial conviction. To illustrate, if asked for their sober opinion about the place reason should occupy, in all probability they would give an answer like Pascal's "La derniere demarche de las raison, o'est de connaitre qu'il y a une infinité de choses qui la surpassent. Elle est bien faible si elle ne va jusque la.. Il faut savoir douter ou il faut, assurer ou il faut, se soumettre ou il faut." But in their poetry they rarely give a sober opinion; and while not denying it, so just a sentiment does not seem to an animate their tone; Pascal is bent on assigning to reason its place; they are bent on asserting how high and honourable that place is. Thus Cowley has a poem on the subject (called - where outside of a Metaphysical poet would be find such a titles- "Reason: the Use of it in Divine Matters") urging its claims; to thie extent:

> "And since itself the boundless Godhead join'd
> With a Reasonable Mind,
> It plainly shows that Mysteries Divine
> May with our reason join"
> (p. 47)

And though what he says is not inconsistent with faith he leaves to others it exaltation. Donne thinks more highly of faith than Cowley, but he also thinks more highly of reason, or is more extravagant in his praise. He writes:-

> "For thus into our reason flow, and there do end,
> All that this natural world doth comprehend,
> Quotidian things and equidistant hence,
> Shut in, for man, in one circumference -
> But for the enormous greatnesses which are
> So disproportioned and so angular,
> As in God's essence, place and providence,
> Where, how, when, what souls do, departed hence,
> These things (eccentric else) on faith do strike;
> Yet neither all, nor upon all alike.
> For reason put to her best extension,
> Almost meets faith and makes both centres one"
> (II, p. 72)

His parenthetic "eccentric else" sums up in little a world of comment on the right of reason to govern, which can thus briefly assign, by such fantastical logic, his place to God.

It is their tone, and not the accuracy of their opinions, to which I desire to draw attention; it is that of men who take a positive pleasure in giving free scope to their intelligences, unbounded scope; they have something of the irresponsibility and high-spirits of schoolboys on a holiday, and something of the good humoured disdain of young gallants lording it among rich citizens and fat-fingered aldermen. They do not care what they say as long as it shows spirit, courage or height of invention, and anything whatever unpossessed of the patent of intellectual nobility they treat as mean pedantry and sordid folly; it is too low for them. Upon all subjects they take high and bold views, transferring, as it were, the arrogance usually arrayed

against religion over into their own camp. It is refreshing to find religious and moralizing poets so unapologetic,as if it were not they but the world, if the world had but sense enough to see it, that stood in need of apology. Each in his own fashion adopts in his remonstrance with the world. The method of argument Donne employes in his Anniversary; it speaks the impatience of the taught man with the ignorant:-

> "When wilt thou shake off this pendantry
> Of being taught by sense and phantasy?
> Thou look'st through spectacles, small things seem great
> Below; but up into the watch-tower get,
> And see all things despoiled of fallacies;
> Thou shalt not peep through lattices of eyes,
> Nor hear through Labyrinths of ears",
> (II, p. 137)

of the man who is capable of high and large views with the creeping and short-sighted. As Crashaw says, they "blush to own a lower hope or speak a narrower word".

But their intellectual effrontery could not stand on reason alone. Unless challenged out of it, reason keeps its own sphere; it is reason in conjunctions with revelation which so exalts their minds and feeds their intellectual pride. Faith and revelation, so far from discouraging reason, are what lift it up into altitudes, and spread before it the kingdoms of the world; the effect upon medieval scholasticism of Revelation, faithfully received, was to rescue it from earthly considerations and set its eyes with a better boldness and assurance upon high matters, high and "obscure with too much light". It does as much for our poets. Generally when they touch upon a theological doctrine it is to boast of its enlarging powers, Cowley is explicit:-

"Excellent Brutus, of all human race
The best, till Nature was improved by Grace;
Till men above themselves Faith raised more
Than Reason above Beasts before."
(p. 195)

Donne speaks similarly:-

"Thou know'st how poor a trifling thing man is,..
The heart being perish'd no part can be free,
And that except thou feed, not banquet, on
The supernatural food, religion,
Thy better growth grows withered and scant;
Be more than man, or thou'rt less than an ant"
(II, pp. 110-111)

Faith enlarges and uplifts reason and reason establishes faith; in the Metaphysical poets they cannot be separated; they combine to compose that spirit, at once high and solid, courageous toward heaven and contemptuous toward earth, which marks them throughout; it marks them in their treatment of religion, (and it is that which chiefly distinguishes them from all other religious poets) but it marks them no less, since, as said before, it is more a tone than an exact content, when they are upon secular subjects.

Toward things of sense, whether or not from a standpoint explicitly religious, they maintain an air of intellectual contempt. It is the same spirit whether appearing in Crashaw when he writes:-

"You have seen already in this lower sphere
Of froth and bubbles, what to look for here:
Say, gentle soul, what can you find
But painted shapes,
Peacocks and apes,
Illustrious flies,
Glided dunghills, glorious lies"
(p. 146)

or whether it is Donne with his

"Poor sublunary lovers' love", or his
"I never stooped so low as they
Which on an eye, cheek, lip can prey"
(I, p. 71)

All things subject to time and space easily are so low one can afford to pity them; they are not worth attacking.

"Poor querelous handful!" thus in Vaughan's poem
(I, p. 26)

does the soul reply to the body's complaints. Thus Crashaw asks "what is man?"

"Let forward dust then do his kind;
And give itself for sport to the proud wind.
Why should a piece of peevish clay plead shares
In the eternity of Thy old cares?"
(p. 100)

"Us", says Donne, "earth, which griefs animate,"
(2, p. 74)

"The good fellowship of dust" (p. 73) Herbert says ironically, and treats death itself with the same contempt:-

"Alas, poor death, where is thy glory?" (p. 212)

and Donne's great poem owes its powerful effect to the same disdainful spirit,- Death, be not proud" (I, p. 163)

"Thou'rt slave to Fate, chance, kings and desperate men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,
And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well,
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?"

Their contempt arises from the extraordinary heights of which their metaphysical pretensions made them free. Their minds, dwelling habitually in the upper regions of thought, where infinity is the standard of measure, and eternity of value, show, when they come to treat of merely terrestrial objects, a certain want of adjustment. Even the most exalted forms, as measured by eyes accustomed to earthly standards, shrink, like the tall ship seen

from the cliff at Dover, "diminish'd to her cock". One is reminded of Gulliver on his return from his visit to Brobdingnag insisting on being allowed to pick up a passing boat for a plaything. It is not uncommon for poets to assume a superiority to the pursuits the run of mankind are engaged in, to the trifling arts, or to speak disdainfully of the love of money and place, and Cowley, complaining that "we heap up yellow earth" is not exceeding the convention. But when he goes on to rail against travels and great wars,

> " And mighty voyages we take,
> And mighty journeys seem to make,
> O'er sea and land, the little point that has no space"
> (p. 209)

he does exceed it; and when he proceeds to include life itself under the head of trifles,-

> " but life's a name
> That nothing here can truly claim..
>
> "We grow at last by custom to believe,
> That really we live:"
> (p. 210)

we feel that he is very lofty indeed. From their great height they look down all ordinary human business, all the ordinary human relations, all knowledge, the affairs and interests which commonly occupy, not vulgar lives and pens merely, but the noblest of both, and cover them all with scorn and contumely. Their reason is that such things come under the laws of change; the laws of change (to use an extravagant metaphor) one would suppose had the property of those laws made to govern some orders in the state, - merely to come under them confers disgrace. And this sublime affectation - it is of course an affectation - extends

itself to include, what even a Metaphysician might be supposed to stand in awe of, - stars and angels. "Figures" says Cowley, "that did transcend a Vulgar Angel's wit," (p. 205) and Crashaw mounts up so high as to speak of "the common people of the skies" (p. 17)[3]. And Crashaw again has a line which passes beyond a suspicion of the mock-sublime,-

> "Whose blush the moon beauteously mars,
> And stains the timorous light of stars" (p. 118)

I said that their sublimity was not natural, that it was a kind of affectation, and so it is -necessarily. Such high-pitched views do not come naturally to low mortals; they are unnatural even to the excited poetic imagination, for however winged, it is still subject to the laws of time and space. They must be grasped, if grasped at all, by sheer reason, and they put a strain upon that, and reason strained always affects us as unnatural, especially in poetry. In a way their high scorn for terrestrial objects is the same class with their conceits, but, also, as in the case of their conceits, one has to remember that naturalness forms no part of the Metaphysical poetic canon, and that by these extraordinary, even illegitimate means, they are able to win effects which possess genuine poetic value.

Again, as in the case of conceits, the affectation is sometimes perfectly conscious, assumed simply for the sake of cleverness; but at other times only half conscious and assumed for some real poetic end. In such a figure as the following

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3. And, another instance: "One little world or two
(Alas!) will never do;
We must have store." (Cr. p. 61)

Crashaw's ambitiousness is mainly conscious and witty,-

> "Fortune? alas, above the world's low wars
> Hope walks and kick the curl'd heads of conspiring
> stars" (Cr. p. 160)[4]

while, when he calls men

> "Dark sons of dust and sorrow,"

when Donne boasts that

> "Difference of sex no more we knew
> Then our Guardian Angels do",
> (1, p. 67)

we have to admit that the transcendental quality contributes to their verse whatever poetic value they possess. By an intellectual effort perhaps, but their mood itself sometimes attains a like height with their language, and in that sense their lofty phraseology may be called natural.

But whether poetry suffers or gains by these metaphysical excesses is just now beside the question; what I am concerned to point out is that they are Metaphysical. Only poets who framed their thoughts to the heights of Metaphysical speculation would have fallen upon them at all. But their exaggeration shows that the balanced proportions of the Metaphysical scheme has been upset, - in medieval poetry one does not find this kind of bravado - and the fact that such an extreme of supersensuality is only to be intellectually apprehended, shows that the overemphasis is an intellectual one.

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4. Though not so entirely, Cowley has the best, I think the only examples of sublimity turned simply to the uses of eleverness.

The Metaphysical group is distinguished then from other poets on the score of substance as well as of style. It is possible to trace in the five poets I have taken to constitute the group (though perhaps not exclusively) a similar background of thought, a similar method of taking hold of a subject, similar attitudes of mind. Different as each is from each, they share a common philosophy which they make distinctively their own by exaggerating certain elements in it; each, to be sure, lays his own emphasis and ngelects possibilities as it suits his own temper, but, speaking generally, they seem to recognize a certain canon, of which in one way or another each feels free to and usually does avail himself. The philosophy which holds them together is orthodox medieval scholasticism, not of course in its details or bearing the impress of a particular doctor or school, but in its great common categories. The special accent they put upon it is to overemphasize its sheerly intellectual side. But, since the members of our group, highly intellectual, highly speculative, as they are, yet make no pretensions to systematic philosophy, their emphasis declares itself principally as a spirit. They evince a disposition to lay hold of a matter by its intellectual handle, instead, as poets regularly do or should, by its sensuous.

It is the two things taken together, their strong metaphysical prepossession and their tendency to break the balance between faith and reason, and to accent the rational aspect, that characterizes their peculiar humour, but the consequences of each had better, for convenience sake, be traced under its own

head. Under the head of scholastic metaphysic singly would fall: (1) A clear, solid and consistent body of principles underlying all their ideas; (2) A dominant and ever-present theological interest; (3) Tendency to give emotion a subordinate place; (4) To make disquisitions instead of songs, laments, narratives, etc.; (5) To treat all subjects in relation to the Metaphysical categories; (6) Absence of moral indistinctness or confusion. More particularly to their intellectual accent are owing: (1) Abstract and unreal treatment of ideas, which leads to (a) juggling with them, (b) use of technical counters, (c) obscurity; (2) Exaltation of reason; (3) Scornful attitude toward all sensible (and some higher) objects; (4) Assumption of a transcendentally lofty point of view.

Such, as I make them out, are the characteristic features of the Metaphysical content. No one poet exhibits them all, but the governing principle - scholastic metaphysic interpreted in accordance with their intellectual prejudices - appears in whatever of substance they have in common, and each poet exhibits a fair proportion of the various aspects I have enumerated; and though he may neglect others, he never does, in any vital sense, contradict them. Such a list cannot of course indicate the special character of particular poets, and so it would seem to miss much what is most interesting and striking in the poetry of the group, but that would have to be. For a canon common to a number of writers, each of marked individuality, it seems to me surprisingly full. All their work, not only the seriously meditative part, but Cowley's court verses, Donne's worldly and satiric poems, is to be included under it; not that this spirit in its

entirety prevails in every poem - naturally not - but that in the great majority of those poems in some aspect it is present.

I might stop at this, but if I did we would be leaving out other common principles which, while not applying to the whole body of their work, yet do apply to a large and important part, moreover, probably, its most characteristic part, - not all, but the great body of classicist work is secular, and not all, but the great body of Metaphysical work is religious, when not in the exact sense of treating religious themes, yet religious, or, better, theological, in the implication of its metaphors and the background of its thought. But its most considerable part is religious in the strict sense, and it is to this part I now have reference. Three of these poets deal almost exclusively with religious subjects, pouring out into verse the ardours and sweetness of a divine communication. No poetry is more completely religious in character than Herbert's and Crashaw's, and Vaughan's only a degree less so. Cowley's most ambitious poem is, like Milton's most ambitious poem, scriptural, though, no more than Milton's does it deserve to be called religious, neither poet being gifted with much religious insight. On this account I do not include the Davideis among their strictly religious work; it is too external in treatment and substance, and is not specially distinguished from the rest of Cowley's work. Donne, less moral than Cowley, is more religious, so religious in the whole cast of his mind, that it would be difficult to say of more than a handful of his verse, this, definitely, is not religious. Many of the "Verse Letters" even, complimentary

epistles to great ladies, are so steeped in divinity, that secular as they are in tone and intention, they would be known for the work of a churchman. It is a peculiarity of his to flatter theologically:-

> "And as I owe my first souls thanks, that they
> For my last soul did fit and mould my clay", etc.,
> (II, p. 59)

His Epicedes and Obsequies are yet more replete with this sort of thing, though with better right. Yet even of a young prince at whose death great hopes perished to write in such a strain as this,-

> "And that his times might have stretched out so far
> As to touch those of which they emblems are",
> (II, p. 73)

> "For all that faith might credit mankind could,
> Reason still seconded that this prince would",
> (II, p. 73)

seems overpitched, even for those times. These last and his magnificent, extraordinary Anniverseries -(if to exalt dead great persons into saints and cherubim is allowable in that form)- are really funeral orations, but still too mixed in purpose to be classed with his purely religious verse. Some half a hundred pages contain all there is of it, but in this short space will be found some of his most powerful and subtle speculation. Yet, even after we have excluded the Davideis and included of Donne's work only the Divine Poems we have under consideration in what follows the bulk of Metaphysical poetry.

Everything which has been noted before as characteristic of their content applies without qualification to the religious verse of the Metaphysical school. So applied, it takes on a nov-

el force and significence. It is unusual to find in religious poetry a clear and solid background of metaphysical ideas, though not unique. Among their contemporaries it is almost usual. Herrick's trifles float and dissolve above an unshifting philosophy like cloud-strips over the face of a summer sky; and Drummond, though, as it seems to me, metaphysical ideas had no more than a poetical hold on him, because his are generally echoed from some one else, either from Spenser or, as for example here, from Donne

> "No rust of times nor change thy virtue wan
> With times to change, when truth, faith, love decay'd
> In this new age; like fate, thou fixed stay'd,
> Of the first world an all-substantial man"
> (II, p. 168)

or from the common stock, as here:-

> "Ah! when I had what most I did admire,
> And seen of life's delights the last extremes,
> I found all but a rose hedg'd with a brier,
> A naught, a thought, a show of mocking dreams"
> (I, p. 138)

if, in truth, this last is not too much of a moral commonplace to be indicative of profounder thoughts - Drummond writes upon the same background. Indeed, in the 17th century that is the common case.

But, with our group it is not merely that they have the old philosophy behind them; they build substantially upon it. Into the categories of Platonic thought, (the categories which Aristotle transferred to the Schoolmen, not the late renaissance romanticised Plato) the distinctions between the world of sense and the non-sensible worlds and such notions as of the double nature of the soul, - they fitted gospel Christianity. The or-

dinary considerations of heaven, eternal punishment, redemption, etc., while they make the matter of their thought, do not fill their minds, as in such a poet as Cowper - his hymns are a fair sample of English religious verse - to the exclusion of an intellectual interpretation. I will risk saying - what certainly at least is frequently so, that it is the philosophic interpretation, the dogma as based on that, which occupies them. Or, if this is too much to say, since they all have times of impassioned emotional simplicity, they never let go of the intellectual aspect of their theme. Their emotion (Herbert), their mysticism (Vaughan) their ardour (Crashaw) is intellectualized. Though not in every page, or, for that matter, in any but a few, is their metaphysical doctrine to be found explicitly stated, nevertheless it furnishes the foundation and plainly, or by implication appears almost everywhere.

Doctrines had been questioned, authority disrupted and the Metaphysicals, living among sceptics, scoffers and controversialists, and not untouched by their spirit, rest their case on what they held to be an impregnable base of conviction. They place their reliance on unshaken, unquestionable (as they conceived) metaphysical principles which are so strong that all others are weak or corrupt or temporary beside them. One is aware, behind all Metaphysical speculation, of this supporting framework.

The Metaphysical philosophy, and the spirit in which they espoused it, both work in them with equal strength. The two

things may not well be separated, since it is the sense of the soundness of their ground and the (comparative) weakness of all others which gives to their work its tone of hardihood and intellectual assurance. Metaphysical distinctions are only apparent to keenly exercised reasons; a grasp on them implies mental vigour, and shows a mind superior to the illusions of the senses. All these circumstances combined to increase their native faith in the supreme value of "wit". Yet it is one thing to have the mind filled with the vision of eternal truths, one thing in itself and one in its effect, and quite another, especially in its poetic effect, to have the mind conscious of itself and of its rights, even though that consciousness springs from a wide and lofty view of truth. For example: From the first point of view one would look upon sin with infinite sorrow, but from the second with infinite contempt; it is a piece of stupidity. So I shall separate them and consider first the results of the second, i.e., the intellectual principle.

We have already seen its effect upon their work in general. Where the effect in connexion with religious verse brings out no new aspects, I need not review it. They continue to juggle with ideas, to talk of "actives" and "passives", to be blind to the advantages of making dark thought look clear.[5] With perhaps some abatement these things are the same. The over-accent on reason belongs especially to Donne and Cowley, but in the

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5. I must say here to the honour of these poets that their language is never obscure when their thought is plain, and though, frequently difficult, never misty; nor do they love simply the appearance of difficulty.

others there is a vigorous, masculine manner, a readiness to give to reason all its rights, which belongs to these alone among the writers of sacred verse. An intellectual disdain of mundane interests and objects is rare enough, even in religious poetry, to be noted, and their viewing things from a great height, though it would seem to belong there, no less so.

Their exaltation of intelligence is due in part of course to the exaggerated estimate of "wit" they shared with the classicists, but with that goes a high contempt for irreligion as a species of ignorance, which I take to be scholastic, and an inclination to treat religion as amenable to the laws of thought, which I also put down as scholastic. The laws of thought to which it conforms need not be those of the scholastics; new philosophies, new ideas abounded on which the Metaphysicals drew to please themselves, but it is part of the scholastic spirit to apprehend the whole of religion as subject to intellectual speculation spirit which they shared to the full. These verses of Vaughan's contain an idea prominent, I believe, in the philosophy of the renaissance; (I know Spenser elaborates it in his Gardens of Adonis) -

" Of death we make
A mere mistake;
For nothing can to nothing fall, but still
Incorporates by skill,
And then returns, and from the womb of things
Such treasure brings,
As phenix-like renew'th
Both life and youth;
For a preserving spirit still doth pass
Untainted through the mass..
Now are those births which we
Thus suffering wee,
Destroy'd at all " (I, p. 26)

and these of Herbert's one which, except in a very popular sense, cannot be called philosophy at all:-

> "But since these great ones, be they ne'er so great,
> Come from the earth, from whence these vessels come;
> So that at once both feeder, dish and meat
> Have one beginning and one final sum;
> I do not greatly wonder at the sight,
> If earth in earth delight."
> (p. 201)

but both show how occupied they were to express religious truth as an intelligible idea. The Adoro te devote, do latens Deitas, S. Thomas Aquinas 'hymn to the Blessed Sacrament, has been called a piece of verisified scholasticism. Between Crashaw's version of it and his own matter there is no perceptible break.

> "Plead for me, Love.' allege and show
> That faith has farther here to go,
> And less to lean on: Because then,
> Though hid as God, wounds writ Thee man..
> And that too was Thyself which Thee did cover,
> But here ev'n that's hid too which hides the other,"[6]
> (p. 110)

is of a piece with his exposition of the Incarnation:-

> "The first Eve, mother of our Fall,
> Ere she bore any one, slew all.
> Of her unkind gift might we have
> The inheritance of a hasty grave:
> Quick-buried in the wanton tomb
> Of one forbidden bit,
> Had not a better fruit forbidden it.
> Had not thy healthful womb,
> The world's new Eastern window been,
> And given us heaven again, in giving Him"
> (p. 118)

and, considered not as philosophy, but only from the point of view of its tendency to make the things of faith matter also for reason,

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6. The Latin runs:-

> In cruce latebat sola Deitas,
> At hic latet simul et humanitas:
> Ambo tamen credens atque confitens,
> Peto quod petivit lathro poenitens.

of a piece with such a passage as this:-

> "This shall from henceforth be the masculine theme
> Pulpits and pens shall sweat in; to redeem
> Virtue to action, that life-feeding flame
> That keeps religion warm; not swell a name
> Of Faith; a mountain-wrod, made up of air".
> (Cr. p. 37)

They take up toward religion a reasonable attitude; they are ready to argue the matter out; theirs is thinking poetry, whether the thought take the form of actual philosophic content, or of the intellectual attitude toward any content.

If in the others emotion is subordinated to thought in Donne, too generally, it has no place whatever. Compare his version of the Incarnation with Crashaw's above, or with Vaughan's here, -

> "Bright Queen of Heaven! God's Virgin Spouse!
> The glad world's blessed Maid!
> Whose beauty tied life to thy house;
> And brought us saving aid.
>
> "Thou art the true Love's knot; by thee
> God is made our ally;
> And man's inferior essence He
> With His did dignify";
> (I, p. 225)

these may be over-philosophical, but they pale by Donne:

> "That All, which always is all everywhere,
> Which cannot sin, and yet all sins must bear;
> Which cannot die, yet cannot choose but die,
> Lo! faithful Virgin, yeidls Himself to lie
> In prison in thy womb; and though he there
> Can take no sin, nor thou give, yet he'll wear,
> Taken from thence, flesh, which death's force may try.
> Ere by the spheres time was created thou
> Wast in His mind, who is thy Son, and Brother;
> Whom thou conceivest, conceived; yea, thou art now
> Thy Maker's maker and thy Father's mother."
> (I, p. 152-3)

The emotion, naturally consequent in the minds of Christians on

the thoughts of such an event, is not only neglected, it is prevented. But, in an extremer form, Donne's hardily intellectual interpretation of religious dogma is typical of the school; though his unsubduable doubts are his own:-

> "I have a sin of fear, that when I've spun
> My last thread I shall perish on the shore".
> (I, p. 213)

They are so bold because they are so certain that in the strife of philosophies religion can more than hold her own. And their certainty surrounds their work with an open, free, uncloseted air which almost, or altogether, compensates for any shock the tender pieties may receive. When Donne writes,-

> "Father, part of His double interest
> Unto Thy Kingdon Thy Son gives me;
> His jointure in the knotty Trinity
> He keeps, "
> (I, p. 166)

his very fearlessness and carelessness of the effect on pious sensibilities shows a bold faith. They have no religious proprieties. They may be blamed, like the scholastics, for too much assurance in the presence of mysteries, for flying the face of the sun. Sense they scorn as a poor base illusion, with the pleasures of sense, even when they feel a temptation to them in themselves, they appear not to struggle but to banish them with the easy confidence of superior knowledge.

> "First, there is no pleasure here:
> Coloured griefs indeed there are,
> Blushing woes, " (II, p. 223)

To the ordinary, unmetaphysical Christian, often all but vanquished by them, these lusts of the flesh and the eye acquire

from the difficulties he has with them a substantial existence, a force on a par with virtue's own, but to these poets they are no more than pretentious unrealities.

Herbert's assurance (Herbert has no wings) does not mount and fly upwards; it seldom rises above the liberty of a conceit, but Vaughan, in spite of his too patient imitation of Herbert, and in spite too of a certain want of native fire, gazes so steadily through the veil of sense as sometimes to be uplifted into supersensual regions. I will not quote his well-known "They are all gone into the World of Light", but illustrate from a less perfect, but more characteristic poem:-

> "The day-star smiles, and light, with Thee deceas'd,
> Now shines in all the chambers of the East.
> What stirs, what posting intercourse and mirth
> Of saints and angels glorify the Earth!
> What sighs, what whispers, busy stops and stays;
> Private and holy talk fill all the ways!..
> I see them, hear them, mark their haste, and move
> Amongst them, with them, filled with faith and love...
> Such was the bright world on the first seventh day...
> When heav'n above them shin'd like molted glass,
> While all the planets did unclouded pass;
> And springs, like dissolv'd pearls, their streams did pour,
> Ne'er mar'd with floods, nor anger'd with a shower."
> (I, p. 179)

In his strictly religious verse Donne never rises to those heights he reaches in the <u>Anniversaries,</u> but in spite of excluding these earlier I must quote from them in this instance:

> "Up, up, my drowsy soul, where thy new ear
> Shall in the angels' songs no discord hear;
> Where thou shalt see the blessed mother-maid..
> Up to those patriarchs, which did longer sit
> Expecting Christ than they've enjoy'd Him yet;
> Up to those prophets, which now gladly see
> Their prophesies grown to be history;
> Up to th' apostles, who did bravely run
> All the sun's course, with more light than the sun;

Up to those martyrs who did calmly bleed
Oil to those apostles' lamps, dew to their seed;
Up to those virgins!"
(II, p. 318-9)

(Never was a more intellectualistic account given of the Beatific Vision!) Of them all Crashaw soars with most ease. Uneven in point of taste as they are, the S. Teresa poems show Crashaw mounting unfalteringly in "piercing and perfumed flights", but again I think I had better take my citation from a poem with which the anthologies have not made us familiar: "a persuasion to resolution in religion": -

"Almighty Love! end this long war,
And of a meteor make a star.
O fix this fair Indefinite!
And 'mongst Thy shafts of soveriegn light
Choose that sure decisive dart
Which has the key of this close heart,
Knows all the corners of't and can control
The self-shut cabinet of an unsearch'd soul.
O let it be at last Love's hour;
Raise this tall trophy of thy power;
Come once the conquering way; not to confute
But kill this rebel word "irresolute"....
O dart of love! arrow of light!
O happy you, if it hit right!
It must not fall in vain, it must
Not mark the dry, regardless dust..
Meet it with wide-spread arms, and see
Its seat your soul's just centre be..
Yield then, O yield, that Love may win
The fort at last, and left life in"
(p. 60)

Whatever Crashaw's defects, want of "wing" was not among them. His flights remind one of Shelley's; but to fly and maintain clear outlines of thought, not losing, himself in images, is a more difficult, though perhaps less poetic feat than a romantic poet could have performed.

It may justly be objected that in these last examples I have given another sense to my phrase "that they view things

from a great height"; rigidly interpreted I have; but with what after all amounts to a flexible poetic attitude, one cannot be too rigid, and to look with disdain upon low objects and with confidence upon high ones are only two aspects of one point of view.

But with the second we pass from an assumption of intellectual superiority to something more genuine, less conscious, - to what I may call the metaphysical imagination. It is still intellectual in the sense of being non-sensuous in origin, but images now begin to mingle with clear ideas, and the object is not only played about by a series of fanciful speculations but occasionally apprehended immediately. The power of immediate grasp varies, however, from poet to poet; for the whole group the term "metaphysical imagination" must be taken to mean the tendency of their minds to range in supersensual regions, their familiarity with the high ranges, not here of thought, but of vision, thought embodied. As Christians not too distant from the middle ages a substantial part of the Dantesque vision would linger in their imaginations, but not theirs the intense and concentrated view of the medieval contemplative. "God, in his angels and in his saints" as a clear, graded, hierarchic vision was beginning to lose, even in the Catholic mind, something of its unwavering exactitude; a more general, less definite sense of a spiritual world governing this one by unseen agencies was beginning to take its place. The same vision, but its light more diffused, its personages of more human, less ideal propor-

tions, and affected also by more enlarged views of the physical heavens, this modern modification of the medieval conception held the background of their imagination and gave it scope and height.

One might add, calm and certitude. According to his temperament each Metaphysical interprets life in one phase or another of these eternal terms. The fact that he does so, this, with his passion for intellectual energy, seems to me to distinguish the religious poetry of the Metaphysical poets from all other religious poetry. In Donne, Cowley and Herbert it is the passion for intellectual energy that prevails, in Vaughan and Crashaw, the Metaphysical imagination; but in his degree each partakes of both.

Since single citations would be insufficient to prove such a general statement, it would seem a better plan to examine some of the best work in this kind from each poet, and draw our conclusions.

As I said, Cowley has practically no religious verse but the Davideis, and the Davideis ~~as an epic~~ is outside our field. His Pindaric ode, The Plagues of Egypt, is in much the same vein as the Davideis. However, it contains a passage which illustrates Cowley's predilection for the great stretches of high space, the lighted heavens, which, ~~since that is~~ the form the Metaphysical imagination takes with him;-I may as well quote:-

"It was the time when the stoll moon,
Was mounted softly to her noon,
And dewy sleep which from night's secret springs arose,
Gently as Nile the land o'erflows.
When (Lo!) from the high countrys of refined day
The golden heaven without allay,
Whose dross in the creation purged away,
Made up the sun's adulterate ray,

Michael, the war-like Prince, does downwards fly
Swift as the journeys of the sight,
Swift as the race of light,
And with his winged will cuts through the yielding sky."
(p. 227)

This is a shade too Miltonic for a Metaphysical poet; in his anxiety to exalt the physical heavens he has brought down the Metaphysical, but, as I say, we do not find Cowley at his most characteristically Metaphysical in his religious verse. Yet his phrase, "the high countrys of refined day" shows a mind accustomed to lofty views, and "winged will" is a Metaphysical expression. But it is rather in its restless play of ideas that the passage is Metaphysical. Outside of our group it would be unusual to come upon such an intricate and indirect method of describing the purity of the upper regions as his, that their dross composes the purest thing we have - the sun. The exaggeration of the metaphor is also Metaphysical.

It would not be quite fair either to Cowley or to my thesis not to quote him when he shows a more serious phase if not of what I have defined as the Metaphysical imagination, yet of Metaphysical thought. Taken in addition to the lines about Michael, these two stanzas from his poem on the death of Mr. William Harvey - one of the few things containing real feeling Cowley's theory of poetry allowed him to write - will give a completer view of his Metaphysical character:-

"Large was his soul; as large a soul as ere
Submitted to inform a body here.
High as the place 'twas shortly in Heaven to have,
But low, and humble as his grave.
So high that all the Virtues there did come
As to their chiefest seat,
Conspicuous and great;
So low that for me too it made a room.

"He scorn'd this busy world below, and all
That we, mistaken mortals, pleasure call;
Was fill'd with innocent gallantry and truth,
Triumphant o'er the sins of youth.
He, like the stars, to which he now is gone,
That shine with beams like flame,
Yet burn not with the same,
Had all the light of youth, of the fire none."
(p. 35)

Again the play of fanciful and curious thought dominates the Metaphysical elements. Cowley thinks it of no detriment to grief to introduce ingenious plays upon the qualities and virtues of his friend and, as sometimes befalls these poets, even wins a true pathos from them. His unexpected

"So low that for me too it made a room",

is both sweet and touching. For the rest the interpretation of life is Metaphysical. A soul that "submits" to "inform a body here", "here" looked upon; as an inferior place, its business worthy of scorn only, its pleasure illusion, that is the simple outline of the Metaphysical view, a view which in our day would be condemned as wanting in courage and the manly spirit of adventure. However, that may be, it keeps in mind the deeper places of philosophy, and takes a stand above sensation. It is a more intellectual view.

The best of Donne's religious verse is either his challenge to death, or the great Hymn to God the Father, but since I have already spoken of the first, and the second illustrates (though in its perfection) only one Metaphysical quality - bold argumentiveness - I will take another not so good but more variously Metaphysical. He calls it - very characteristically - " Hymn to Christ at the Author's last going into Germany";I quote

[illegible]

it entire: all but the last stanza:-

"In what torn ship soever I embark,
That ship shall be my emblem of Thy ark;
What sea soever swallow me, that flood
Shall be to me an emblem of Thy blood;
Though Thou with clouds of anger do disguise
Thy face, yet through that mask I know those eyes,
Which, though they turn away sometimes,
They never will despise.

"I sacrifice this island unto Thee,
And all whom I love there, and who love me,
When I have put our seas 'twixt them and me,
Put Thou Thy seas betwixt my sins and Thee.
As the tree's sap doth seek the root below
In winter, in my winter now I go,
Where none but Thee, the eternal root
Of true love, I may know.

"Nor Thou, nor Thy religion dost control,
The amorousness of an harmonious soul;
But Thou would'st have that love Thyself; as Thou
Art jealous, Lord, so I am jealous now;
Thou lovest not, till from loving more Thou free
My soul; whoever gives, takes liberty;
O if Thou carest not whom I love,
Alas! Thou lovest not me."
(I, p. 193-4)

This is religion of the brain, full of striving and straining, like all of Donne's religious verse, an intellectual argument with God. This particular phase of intellectualism is Donne's peculiarly; intellectualism in the others not excluding either unction as in Herbert, or mysticism ~~and love~~, as in Vaughan and Crashaw; the quality he shares with these ~~is not the absence of joy and peace, but the presence of~~ this unflagging effort to give an intelligible account of religion, to address his reader's mind instead of his emotions. The whole of life, every occasion in it, is interpreted religiously and all religion is interpreted mentally. What is there in a man, no longer young, embarking for Germany to bring up devout impressions? How steeped in relig-

ious thought must a mind be to have a passenger ship remind it of the Church, the sea of Christ's blood, storms of spiritual aridities? Into what remote places must it have penetrated to turn a parting into a sacrifice of family and country which is to win him a proportionate separation from sin. These are not the natural reminders of sense or imagination; they would only arise in a subtle brain at work upon a translation of life into dogma.

It is not only that he thinks in Metaphysical categories. His intellectualistic spirit carries him on to a prolonged and curious play upon his symbolized ocean, which he follows with another which compares his journey to the winter retreat of the sap of trees to their roots, and then proceeds to close in with his divine interlocutor upon a question of mutual jealousy; in which dispute his indomitable brain takes strange liberties. These and the large-handed extravagance of

"I sacrifice this island unto thee"

are in the right Metaphysical vein. Not a word in the poem but is referable either to their principle of intellectual energy or to the Metaphysical imagination; it is a combination of the two, that of intellectual energy, on the whole, prevailing.

After Cowley and Donne, in the order of intellectual energy, comes Herbert; but his is of another kind from theirs. Where they are subtle and difficult, he is as downright and homely as he can make himself, - not as clear, but as familiar. With him intellectual energy takes the form of making religious ideas come home to the understanding; he is too much a man of his school

not to try to provoke and stimulate the mind with vigorous thought tersely put, careless whether the reader may comprehend him without effort, rather preferring it, on the whole, and fond of learned and unused similes. But he is too intent upon making converts not to press his matter by every means in his power, by plain diction, startling comparisons, an appeal to his reader's good sense. A vigorous didacticism is the staple of Herbert's poetry, commonplaces uncommonly expressed. When he rises above that he does not let go of his familiar manner, He always takes hold of his subject forcibly and actively; at his best moments this active force becomes a quick dramatic power, intensely moving. This is the typical Herbert, human and homely. Consequently one seldom finds Herbert turning his thoughts upon the kind of theme that would bring into play the Metaphysical imagination. Metaphysical notions fill the background of his philosophy, but they usually remain there, or coming forward, express themselves after this fashion:-

> "For either thy command or thy permission
> Lay(s) hands on all; they are thy right and left:
> The first puts on with speed and expedition;
> The other curbs sin's stealing pace and theft".
> (p. 143)

However, as it happens, the one poem which does exhibit the Metaphysical imagination in a high degree is probably the most nearly perfect thing he wrote. That full perception of eternal values in the face of which all that is transitory dissolves and disappears - this perception - the core of the Metaphysical imagination - pervades his Vertue.

"Sweet Day, so cool, so calm, so bright,
The bridal of the earth and sky;
The dew shall weep thy fall tonight;
For thou must die.

"Sweet Rose, whose hue, angry and brave,
Bids the rash gazer wipe his eye;
Thy root is ever in the grave,
And thou must die.

"Sweet Spring, full of sweet days and roses,
A box where sweets compacted lie;
My music shows ye have your closes,
And all must die."
(p. 103-4)

in these first three stanzas it is the quiet and immediate perception of the eternal through the temporary which prevails (that is the imaginative perception) in the last stanza the sententious and intellectual:-

"Only a sweet and virtuous soul,
Like seasoned timber, never gives;
But, though the whole world turn to coal,
The chiefly lives."

But it is the Metaphysical imagination without alloy which prevails in Vaughan's Peace, a poem in spirit not unallied to Herbert's Vertue.

"My soul there is a country,
Far beyond the stars,
Where stands a winged sentry
All skilful in the wars:
There above noise and danger,
Sweet Peace sits crown'd with smiles,
And One born in a manger
Commands the beauteous files.
He is thy gracious Friend,
And-O my soul wake!-
Did in pure love descend,
To die here for thy sake.
If thou canst but get thither,
There grows the flower of Peace,
The Rose that cannot whither,
Thy fortress and thy ease.
Leave then thy foolish ranges,
For none can thee secure,
But One, who never changes,
Thy good,[7] thy life, thy cure." (I, p. 83)

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7 Or "God"

This is a Metaphysical contemplation of the quietness of eternity. All the other Metaphysical elements are absent. The thought is so anything but strange as to be all but trite; the comparisons are common and "poetic", the cadences sweet and still, the whole without a shadow of violence, strangeness or incongruity. But to see how Metaphysical it is, compare it with any romantic poem on the same subject, with "I'm wearin' awa' Jean", for example, or Cardinal Newman's popular hymn, - unlike either, it is untouched by that bane of most religious verse, sentimentality. Or, again, to bring out its Metaphysical quality, compare it with that beautiful Elizabethan piece,- "O Mother dear, Jerusalem." The comparison will establish its substitution of intellectual for sensuous images, its want of colour, of pictorial quality, of earthliness. Vaughan's poem is abstract; his heaven is empty of "gardens and goodly walks", it is even empty of divine forms and personages. Mary here does not walk singing with her maidens. Only S. Michael, and he unnamed, reduced to the elements of his office, and Christ, also unnamed and, by a marvel of restraint and simplicity, characterized by a single circumstance; ~~He is~~ "One born in a manger". Note the effect of distance and removal from the whole phenominal world attained by the simple phrase,- "far beyond the stars"; how the phenomenal world is summed briefly as "noise and danger", indicating heaven as their contraries. To give the sense of what is not to be imaged he resorts to the intellectual device of symbolism:-

"Sweet Peace sits crown'd with smiles";

"There grows the flower of Peace,
The Rose that cannot wither,
Thy fortress and thy ease."

This is the heaven of the intellectual mystic; all else is "foolish ranging".

There is more visibility in Crashaw's, his imagination though as Metaphysical as Vaughan's ~~is~~ being less intellectual, and even open to the charge of sensuousness:-

"So soon as thou shalt first appear,
The moon of maiden stars, thy white
Mistress, attended by such bright
Souls as thy shining self, shall come,
And in her first ranks make thee room..
O what delight, when revealed Life shall stand
And teach thy lips Heaven with His hand;
On which thou now may'st to thy wishes
Heap up thy consecrated kisses.
What joys shall seize thy soul, when she,
Bending her blessed eyes on thee,
(Those second smiles of heaven), shall dart
Her mild rays through thy melting heart.

"..All thy good works which went before
And waited for thee at the door,
Shall own thee there, and all in one
Weave a constellation
Of crowns, with which the King, thy Spouse
Shall build up they triumphant brows...
Thou shalt look round about, and see
Thousands of crown'd souls throng to be
Themselves thy crown...
Thou with the Lamb, thy Lord, shalt go,
And whereso'er He sets His white
Steps, walk with Him those ways of light."
(Hymn to S. Teresa, pp. 133-5)

In many ways, especially in the matter of style, the weakest of the Metaphysicals, I take Crashaw last and run the risk of a weak ending, because, in this matter of superterrestrial imagination, he has a gift beyond any other member of the school. It may be said in objection that he imagines heaven after the figures of earth, and patterns divine love on human, while the typical Meta-

physical does not show an absence of sensuous images; he only does not use them interpretatively; if Crashaw appears to it is because his readers' imaginations are too earthy for him and suppose him to be doing what he is not. In English Crashaw's is the only mystically ecstatic poetry we have; and we have nothing to go by. The Spanish mystics give us the clue: Crashaw has the imagination of a saint:- "Poet and Saint", Cowley calls him:-

> "Poet and Saint! to thee alone are given
> The two most sacred names of earth and heaven.
> The hard and rarest union that can be
> Next that of Godhead with humanity"
> (Cw. p. 48)

He is, in imagination, uplifted to something like a direct apprehension of states to which no earthly experience, no human love, could give him the key; and there he is held with only the "frail visibles" of human language in which to pour out his raptures. We must not be misled by his "flames" and "darts" and "kisses". Not possessed of the sober judgment of the supreme poets, his chief inspiration the prose of S. Teresa, - which while not itself florid compels its translator to such heights of expression as he is capable of and wielding an almost too supple and exquisite poetic instrument, the language he uses is the only language possible to him, and it is carping to ask for any other. Moreover, for all its over-decoration it has a substantial body. Such a line as

> "Shall build up thy triumphant brows"

shows a strong hand, and when there is a call for it, Crashaw has "a firm-pointed pen". Indeed, though delicate, it is firm-

pointed throughout. There is a skilful tracery and unblurred handling of the figures here; there is great assurance (it was necessary) in the management of the emotion; there is a definiteness of thought which, at such a height it would need the mental alertness of a Metaphysical poet to maintain. But it is by his free and bold imagination which does not draw back from depicting heaven itself,- not intellectually like Donne, nor in negatives and symbols, like Vaughan, but having, as it were, its eye on the object, that he touches the summit of the Metaphysical gift, or that portion of it which has for its field the science of the celestial.

Conclusion

In this essay I have limited myself to the exposition of a theory of Metaphysical poetry, in trying to bring under a few principles - as few as would account for them - all the unusual elements which seemed to have a relation to one another in the work of the five poets I have considered. Such a procedure isolates only a part of the whole problem. The first part of it, whether, in fact, the Metaphysical school has a real existence, I had to assume, not as solved, but as sufficiently indicated by criticism to serve as an hypothesis. The second part, that is, what elements constitute the Metaphysical character, would follow from the solution of the first. For the only way the existence of a school could be demonstrated would be to compare the work of those poets, who, by something like a common consent, were called Metaphysical, to search for common or related elements, deducing that these similar elements, if they furnished a unique poetical combination, constituted a school. My method has been to name certain principles, to indicate on what grounds I arrived at them and then show how they included all of the tendencies in these writers, which bind them together and distinguish them from the poets about them. In this method, I had to assume no more than if I had taken up the problem earlier, for, in both methods, it would be necessary to work on the hypothesis that the full Metaphysical character would declare itself, if anywhere, in the five poets studied. And if it is true that

there is a real connexion between the traits of these poets, a connexion having a character of its own and not merely an adventitious,- that, in itself, is evidence, that they make up a school. To make the study complete I should have applied my theory as well as stated it. Are there other Metaphysical poets besides those from whom the principles have been deduced? It is plain that some of the same elements are to be found in all poetry contemporary with theirs. We would still need to compose two tests, one to detect the presence of the Metaphysical strain in any poetry; one to distinguish a poet completely Metaphysical from one who shows the strain but who is better classified with some other group. To compose and apply these tests would make another study longer than this. Here I shall content myself with a definition which ~~will~~ serve as a test for the Metaphysical strain, wherever it is found.

On what grounds, then, do we say this or that poet is a Metaphysical? What right have we to assume that certain features put together from four or five poets, pointed to by what after all are fairly indefinite indications, constitute the metaphysical character? Yet we have a ground. The features gathered by the light of a faint criticism, when set beside one another, make up a face. Scattered about in various, not always associated poets, and there half-effaced, they seem, even by an unscrutinized impression, to have a connexion though an unclear one. More curiously examined they bear out this impression; to use the popular modern expression, their connexion is organic. From the conglomerate a single character emerges.

The first essential of a definition of "Metaphysical" is that intellectual energy shall be an ideal to which all other poetic ideals are subordinate. But since there are a few other poets (not many) who share this ideal, we must modify it and say (2) that, in style, this energy works on a base of 17th century classicism, and (3), in substance, on a base of scholastic philosophy. These phrases, which are in themselves rather indefinite, need to be read in the light of the whole essay. Yet I do not think we will go far wrong, if, coming upon a passage in which the style is active and masculine, the substance shows a familiar acquaintance with the philosophy of the School, and intellectual energy is dominant, we pronounce it Metaphysical. This definition says nothing of conceits or of the other characteristic faults of the school; but these may be included under "intellectual energy", since, if that is allowed to domineer over the imaginative and emotional faculties, a train of bad results, including conceits, may be expected to follow. The phrase, while not excluding the vices, points to the virtues of the school.

One of the plainest signs that this character is single and integral is that, when we use it as a standard by which ~~the~~ measure the work of any one poet, it cannot be made to fit some portions of it, and, yet will extend itself to take in another portion, and stamp as Metaphysical some element peculiar to that author alone. One cannot help seeing that Herbert's fondness for a very homely, almost a common, diction - a diction Cowley

would have disdained as "low" - is only an extension of a principle which Cowley shared and acted upon, that is, the rejection of the conventional "poetic" in favour of the vocabulary of modern speech.

Normally, each representative of the school will exhibit certain of its characteristics in a more complete and perfect manner than any other in the group, while, at the same time, he will be blind on the side of certain other elements. Some of his work is bound to be un-Metaphysical or non-Metaphysical, and the rest to exhibit the metaphysical character only incompletely.

This theory of their poetic procedure is not founded on any enumeration of common elements; the theory itself supplies a connexion between tendencies which superficially seem to bear no particular resemblance. Nor does it assume that every poet exhibits either all of these tendencies accounted for, or any of them in an equal degree with other members of the group. In this I follow the analogy of any other school of poetry. No single poet in this group, not Donne himself, will exhibit all its characteristics, and the least Metaphysical among them has some quality - seen to be Metaphysical by an extension of principle - which belongs to him almost exclusively. Each in his own fashion illustrates some aspects of the movement. So, if in every instance I have not been able to quote in confirmation from all five poets, my theory is not weakened by it. Indeed if they possessed unanimously the qualities which would make that possible, it would be a sign of the artificiality of the links which connected them.

I am aware that my account of these principles is open to contradiction and disagreement. In some of its details I recognize that I may very well have fallen into that common pit-fall of theorists - that of assuming for the facts in question my interpretation was not only the right but the only one. But even if there is another and better interpretation, not open to minor charges of incorrectness, this study will not be wasted, if it helps to establish the conviction that "Metaphysical" is not an empty title, nor an odd expression for a certain kind of queer conceit, but that the name occupies a place among the theories of poetic style, is a good name for a unique combination of poetic principles, and furnishes the best description of a number of poets - not the least in our language - who otherwise have not been satisfactorily classified.

The page and volume references, when no edition is specified, are taken from Muses' Library Editions of the poems of Donne, Vaughan, Crashaw, Marvell, Carew and Drummond. The text of Cowley is Waller's issued by the Cambridge Press; of Herbert, Willmott's edition in the British Poets series. For Southwell I used the Fuller's Worthies Edition.

V I T A

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I, Grace, Bagnall Branham was born in Baltimore, September the eighth, 1887. I graduated from the Bryn Mawr School in 1906, and from Bryn Mawr College in 1910. From 1910 until 1912 I was secretary for the Consumers' League of Maryland; studied English and Economics at the Johns Hopkins University from January to June of 1913, and the next year (1913-1914) taught English and Greek at Saint Mary's School, Garden City, Long Island. In 1914 I resumed post-graduate work at the University, following the courses in English, Philosophy and French, taking the degree of Master of Arts in 1916. My work in English was done under the direction of Professor James Wilson Bright, in Philosophy under Professors Arthur O. Lovejoy and Henry Slonimsky and in French under Professors Armstrong and M. Carcassonne, to all of whom I take this opportunity of expressing my sincere appreciation, but especially to Dr. Bright.

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